NEW
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

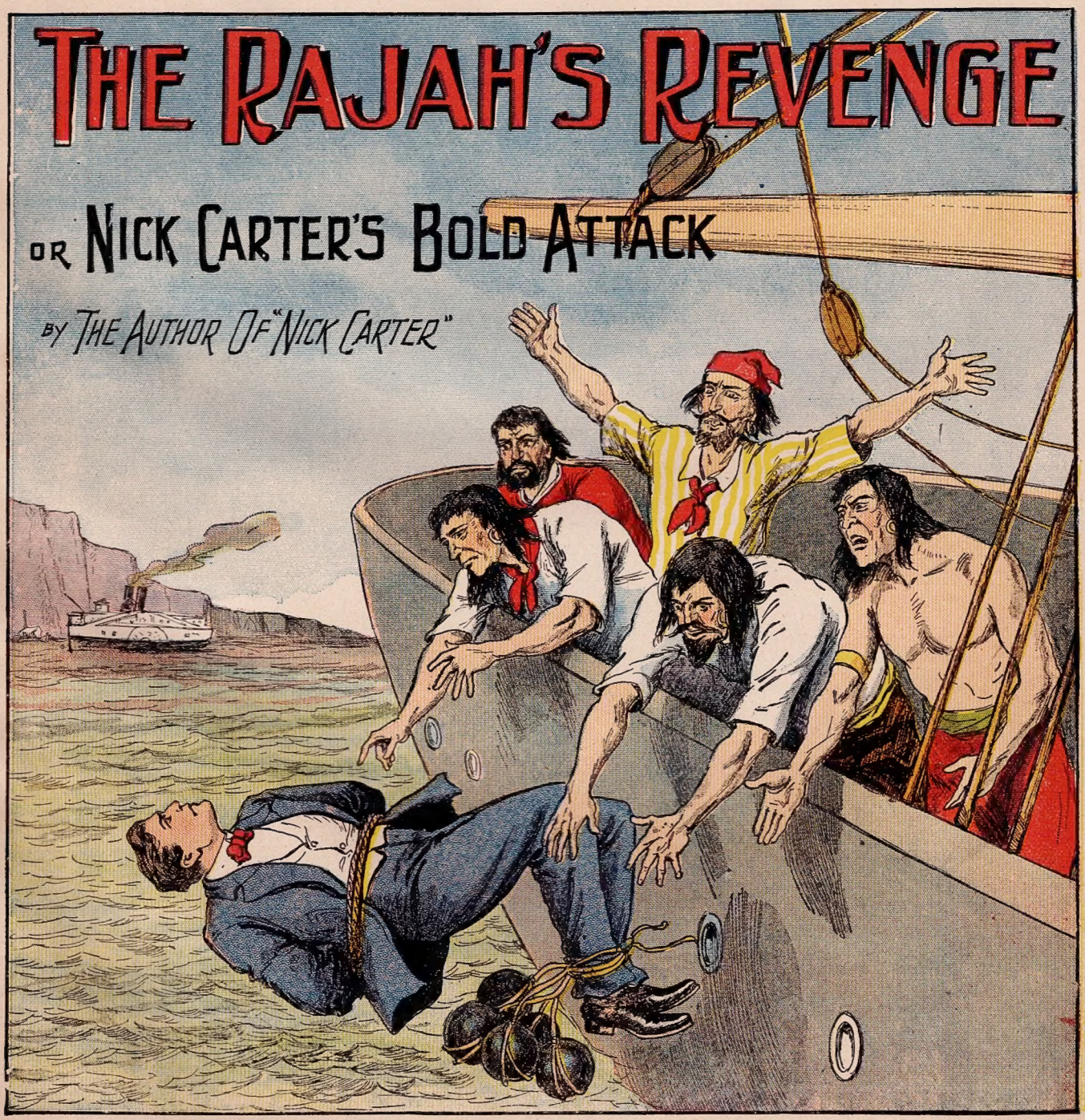
Issued Weekly. By Subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.*

No. 457. *Price, Five Cents.*

THE RAJAH'S REVENGE

OR NICK CARTER'S BOLD ATTACK

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



And then the men lifted the detective over the rail and dropped him into the black waters of the river.

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The Rajah's Revenge;

OR,

NICK CARTER'S BOLD ATTACK.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE MURDER AT WASHINGTON HEIGHTS.

Nick Carter, detective, and Stephen O'Brien, chief of the detective bureau of the city of New York, stood facing each other in a room that was half sun parlor and half conservatory, and in a house with spacious grounds around it, located in One Hundred and Fifty-second Street, between Broadway and the Hudson River.

Between them, stretched at full length upon a luxurious couch, was the dead body of a young and beautiful woman, and at the doorway which communicated with the main hallway of the house were two policemen in uniform.

A little to the right was the captain of the precinct, and over in one corner of the room a woman was silently weeping, while a tall, handsome man stood beside her, with one hand resting on her shoulder, in a mute gesture of comfort and sympathy.

If a stranger, unacquainted with the circumstances, had entered the room at that moment, and his eyes had fallen upon the body of the dead woman, he would not have believed that life was extinct, for she was lying in an attitude of perfect repose, and her position—to say nothing of an open book halfway between her hips and knees, upon which her left hand was resting—suggested that she had merely dropped asleep while engaged in reading.

But she was dead, nevertheless; and a somewhat closer inspection would quickly have revealed the cause of her taking off, for the jeweled hilt of a foreign-looking dagger glistened underneath a fold of lace which covered her bosom, as if the murderer had deftly placed it there after committing the crime, in order partly to conceal the hideous evidence of his terrible act.

The two detectives had just entered the room, and paused in the positions in which we discovered them; and, after a moment of careful observation, Nick Carter

raised his head and looked across the corpse into the eyes of the chief of detectives, while he remarked, in a quiet tone:

"I know her, Steve," and then, perceiving that his remark drew forth no comment from the inspector, he added:

"I mean, of course, that I knew her when she was alive."

"You knew her personally?" said the inspector, with an interrogation at the end of his remark.

"Yes."

"Who was she, Nick?"

"She was Nadja Covington, originally—that is, when I knew her. Afterward she married an Englishman by the name of Montague. I received cards for the wedding less than a month ago, from London. I had no idea that she was in this country."

"Do you know anything about her, Carter?"

"I knew all about her up to a time about three months ago. She was the last descendant of a long line of Indian rajahs, although her father was an Englishman. Her mother was the last of her race, and now it is extinct forever."

"Does your knowledge of her suggest to you who might have committed this deed?"

"It most certainly does."

"Who, then?"

"A distant kinsman of hers—the rajah of Matarapur, surnamed Jaharazubar."

The inspector smiled grimly.

"A man with the burden of such a name as that might be guilty of any crime under the sun," he said.

"Who are these people?" asked Nick, indicating the man and the weeping woman over in the corner of the room.

"I have asked no questions as yet, Nick. I don't know any more about the case than you do," was the reply.

Nick turned, and motioned to one of the officers, and, when he approached, said to him:

"Take these two people into the parlor, and see that they wait there until we are ready to talk with them. After that you will leave the captain, the inspector and myself alone in this room until you are called."

"Captain," said Nick, as soon as the three were alone in the room of death, "when did you first know about this affair?"

"Two hours ago, when I telephoned to the inspector," replied the captain.

"And how did you learn about it?"

"From the man whom you just sent from the room. He telephoned to me that a murder had been committed in the house, and asked me to come around at once. I did so, bringing those two patrolmen with me. Then, as soon as I saw what had happened, I telephoned for the inspector, and also for the coroner."

"Have you questioned the man or the weeping woman at all?"

"Very little. I saw that it was a grave affair, and preferred to leave that part of it for the inspector."

"Do you know who they are?"

"Yes; Mr. and Mrs. John Sylvester; I believe the woman's first name is Myra."

"Do you know anything about them?"

"Merely that they have lived in this house ever since I have been in the precinct, and that, as far as I am aware, they are quiet, ordinary, respectable people."

"Do you know how long a time this dead woman has lived here?"

"I never saw her, or heard of her, before in my life."

"Have you known this Mr. Sylvester personally?"

"Merely a speaking acquaintance; that is all."

"As far as you know, is he all right?"

"Yes."

"And his wife, also?"

"Yes."

Nick turned away from the captain, and bent over the form upon the couch.

"Poor girl! Poor child!" he murmured. "Your life was a stormy one while it lasted. I feared, when I brought you out of India, that your enemies would seek you out and kill you; and now they have done it."

While he was engaged in studying the features of the dead girl—for she was only a girl of eighteen when she was murdered so cruelly—the inspector was casting eager and searching glances around the room.

Presently he crossed to a table, and picked up a handkerchief, which half covered a pad of writing paper; but, if the handkerchief had interested him at first, what he discovered beneath it attracted him still more.

There was writing upon the top sheet of the pad, which had, nevertheless, been torn loose and folded, although whoever it was who had done that, that person had evidently unfolded it again.

Indeed, as the inspector examined it, he became convinced that the sheet of paper had been originally placed in an envelope, and then, for some unknown reason, it had been removed again—doubtless with the intention of the writer to add something to the letter, or to refrain altogether from sending it.

"Come here, Nick," he called to the detective. "Take a look at this."

He gave the sheet of paper into the hand of Nick Carter, who read, aloud:

"PAUL: Your importunities are useless, worthless and idle. I will not return to you—ever. It will be as well for you to understand this at once, and for all time. We can have nothing in common after the episode which occurred the day before I sailed for this country. My private fortune, left to me by my mother, is still in my own name, and it will be amply sufficient for my needs, so I shall never apply to you for a shilling. I have no

love left for you. You destroyed that forever in a single moment, when you doubted my truth and my loyalty so soon after our marriage, and, in the excess of your rage, threatened to kill me. It all ends here and now. You were foolish to follow me to America. Men and women of my race do nothing idly; there is always intensity of purpose in every act, no matter how trivial it may appear outwardly. Return to your own country, and resume your old habits. As for me, I shall speedily forget you. Furthermore—for it is as well that you should know my purpose—I shall seek out the only friend I have in this country—Mr. Nicholas Carter, who saved my life, and more, in India—and through him I will find an attorney, who will inform me how to get a divorce from you. You see, I am determined. If you send me any more letters, I will not read them; certainly, I shall not reply to them. If you attempt to see me, I will avoid you, if I can, and certainly I will not address a word to you. You shall not hear the sound of my voice. I wish you no harm, but I do wish never to see you or to hear from you again so long as I live. NADJA."

"Well," said the inspector, when Nick had finished reading the letter, "what do you think of that?"

"I scarcely know what to think of it—yet," was the guarded reply.

"Looks a little bit dark for the husband, doesn't it? And it rather upsets your theory about the rajah, doesn't it? Eh?"

"Possibly—possibly," mused Nick, in reply.

"Well, suppose, now, that you take a look at this?" continued the inspector, putting the handkerchief into Nick Carter's hand; "and, while you are thinking about it, I will take a look at some torn bits of paper that I see over there in the fireless grate.

He crossed the room to the grate, while Nick examined the handkerchief, which was a large, cambric affair, with the initials "P. M." embroidered in one corner; and, while he looked at it, something fell from its folds to the floor.

The detective stooped and picked it up, only to discover that the object which had fallen from the handkerchief was a large, round pearl.

After gazing at it for a moment, Nick returned to the body of the woman, carefully moved the lace aside, where it covered the hilt of the dagger, and discovered, as he had more than half expected to do, that just such a pearl was missing from its setting in the jeweled handle of the weapon.

He smiled grimly, and murmured something that was inaudible to the others in the room, but which was:

"They have done it almost too well, I think—almost too artistically."

Then he raised his eyes, in reply to an exclamation from the inspector.

"Here, Nick!" said O'Brien; "look at this, will you?"

Nick looked.

The inspector held in his hand a torn envelope, although no part of it was missing; and across it, written in a large, bold, feminine hand, was the address:

"Paul Montague, Esq., Hotel Maintenon, Manhattan, City," he read, aloud, to the detective.

"Looks as if that letter was ready for the post, doesn't it?" he said. "See, here is an uncancelled stamp in the corner. What do you think of it, Nick?"

"I haven't begun to think yet, inspector," was the reply.

"Well, from the evidence of the letter, the torn envelope and the handkerchief, it looks to me very much as if that discarded husband had at least been in this room. Doesn't it look that way to you, Nick?"

"Why, yes, it certainly does suggest that."

He placed the pearl he had found in the inspector's hand then, and told him where and how he had found it; and then he pointed toward the empty setting in the hilt of the dagger.

"That makes your theory of the case stronger still, doesn't it, Steve?" he asked, quietly.

"Eh? My theory? Isn't my theory the same as yours, Nick?"

"I think that, as far as we have gone, things begin to look rather dark for Paul Montague," replied the detective, evasively. "All the same, I won't cross any bridges till I get to them."

"That as you please. As for me, I shall send to the Maintenon at once, and, if Montague can be found, he shall be arrested."

"Yes; I think that is a wise precaution."

"Don't you agree with me that he should be arrested without delay?"

"Certainly I agree with you."

"Then why are you so passive about the matter?"

"I am not passive; far from it. If I had known nothing of the history of this dead girl, I should feel exactly as you do about it; and just now I am turning some things over and over in my mind, and endeavoring to fit them together. The only trouble about it is that they won't fit."

"Well, you can't make two pieces of anything fit together if they are not cut right in the first place."

"I know; but sometimes a little shaving here and there makes a perfect fit; eh?"

"True for you, Nick!"

"I suppose you don't mind if I work a little on this case in my own way, do you, Steve?" asked the detective. "The fact is, I feel a personal loss in the death of that young woman. I knew her very well and intimately for the short time we were in India. I became quite fond of her, and, above all, I pitied her."

"Certainly, old man; work on the case as much as you please, and how you please; and, if there is any assistance you want from my office, take it. More—after I have arrested Montague, I'll hold the matter back for a time,

if you wish it; but I do think that he should be arrested, don't you?"

"I do, yes. But I want to look more deeply into this thing, Steve, and I want time to do it."

"You shall have all the time you want."

"Thank you. I am convinced, in my own mind, and against the outward appearance of things, that there is a nigger in the fence here somewhere—and I will find that 'nigger,' if there is one, just as sure as you are Stephen O'Brien."

"I haven't a doubt in the world of it, Nick."

"There is a telephone in the house here. You can send your order now for the arrest of Montague. While you are doing that, I will go into the parlor and talk with Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester."

"Wait, Nick. I want to be with you when you do that."

"All right. Tell the detectives you send after him that he is six feet two, and built in proportion, sandy hair and smooth shaven, and that there is a scar left by a bullet that hit him during the Boer War, just over the left temple."

"Ah! You have seen him, then, eh?"

"No; but I have heard this poor girl describe him often."

CHAPTER II.

THE FINGER OF SUSPICION.

The next scene is in the parlor of the same house, when Nick Carter questioned Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester.

"Will you tell me," he said to the woman, "by what name you knew the young woman who has met with such an unfortunate end?"

"We knew her as Mrs. N. C. Montague," was the reply.

"Her maiden name was Nadja Covington," said Nick, "so the initials are all right. Now, did you know her before she came here?"

"I knew her and her mother at St. Johns Wood, London, ten years ago. I had not seen her since that time until she came here and asked me to take her to board."

"When was that?"

"One week ago yesterday."

"Did you recognize her when she appeared here?"

"No; I had not seen her since she was eight years old."

"How did she know how to find you?"

"She told me that, when she decided to come to America, she remembered that her mother once knew some people by the name of Sylvester, who had come to New York to live, and that, by searching through some old papers and letters of her mother's, she discovered our address. That address was in Forty-ninth Street, and she went there first; from there she was directed here."

"You remembered who she was when she told you her name?"

"Of course."

"Did you ever see the man she married?"

"Yes; this morning."

"Ah! So he was here this morning, was he?"

"He called here at about half-past ten; yes, sir."

"Tell me about that call. Who admitted him?"

"I did."

"What did he say?"

"He asked if Mrs. Montague was stopping here, and I replied that she was. He then said that he was Mr. Montague, and that he wished to see his wife. I showed him into the par——"

"You were not aware, then, that there were any differences between Mr. and Mrs. Montague, were you?"

"No; she had told us nothing about that—if there were differences; and I suppose there were, for, when I went to the conservatory, where she was reading a book, and told her that her husband was here, she flew into a passion, and declared that she would not see him at all. However, he had followed me through the hall, and, when she said that, he brushed past me, and begged of her to listen to him. I thought then that the best thing for me to do was to get out of the way and let them settle their affairs alone, so I pulled the door shut, and went upstairs to my own room."

"That, you say, was about half-past ten o'clock."

"Between half-past ten and a quarter of eleven; yes, sir."

"Now, did you have any other callers at the house this morning?"

"No, sir; not one."

"How long a time did you remain upstairs in your own room?"

"I did not come down again until—until I found her."

"What time was that?"

"Half-past one. I remember, because I was astonished to find that it was so late. I was doing some embroidery work, in which I was very much interested, and the time passed much more rapidly than I supposed."

"So, from about a quarter to eleven until half-past one you were in your own room?"

"I was."

"Do you keep servants, Mrs. Sylvester?"

"I keep two, as a rule; it happens that to-day I am without any, for both of them left me yesterday afternoon, without notice."

"Where was Mr. Sylvester during this time?"

"He was at his office. He is in the real estate business, and has an office just around the corner on Broadway."

"My wife came to my office on a run when she found the body," said Mr. Sylvester. "The first thing she did when she got there was to faint away, so it was several moments before I could find out what was the matter. As soon as I did find out, I telephoned to the police sta-

tion, and then hurried home with my wife. I was here when the captain and his men arrived."

"Thank you," said Nick. Then he turned to the woman again:

"Where is your room located, Mrs. Sylvester?"

"In the wing, over the dining room."

"It is some distance, then, from the stairway, is it not?"

"Yes."

"When you went to your room, after admitting Mr. Montague, did you remain there?"

"I did not leave the room again until I came downstairs at half-past one."

"Did you hear any noise that suggested to you that Mr. Montague was leaving the house?"

"I heard no noise at all, that I can remember, sir."

"If the front door bell had been rung while you were in your room, could you have heard it there, do you think?"

"I might not have heard it; but, still, I think I would have done so. I have noticed that when it does ring while I am in my room that sometimes I hear it, and often I do not. I do not listen, because I usually have servants to answer it."

"But you are reasonably sure that it did not ring again this morning after you admitted Mr. Montague?"

"Yes, sir; I am quite satisfied about it."

"And you are also sure that you did not hear him when he went away?"

"I am positive about that."

"Do you happen to know if Mrs. Montague wrote a letter this morning?"

"She told me, as she was leaving the breakfast table, that she had an unpleasant letter to write, and that she dreaded it. I don't know whether she wrote it or not."

"Has she never mentioned her husband to you at all?"

"Never once."

"How did she explain being here alone?"

"She did not explain the circumstance, and I did not ask her about it. It was no affair of mine. I had known her mother, and I had been fond of the girl as a child. She seemed to be quite a proper person, and I was satisfied—indeed, pleased—to have her here."

"Did you ever hear her mention my name?"

"I don't know your name, sir."

"It is Nicholas Carter."

"Yes; she asked me one day if I knew you, or could tell her where you lived. I could not, and I suggested that she look in the directory. She looked there, and could not find your name; and then, when she told me that you were a detective, I suggested that she write to the police and ask them about it. I don't know whether she did so or not."

"Since she came here, has any other person, aside from her husband, called upon her?"

"Yes, sir. She received a call the day after she arrived."

"From whom?"

"I don't know his name. I had no opportunity to find it out, and she did not offer to tell me after he had gone."

"Who admitted him?"

"I did. Mrs. Montague and I happened to be passing the hall together when the bell rang, and I opened the door. A tall, dark gentleman, elegantly dressed, stood on the doorstep, and he immediately discovered her over my shoulder. He spoke to her, and she gave a start of surprise, I thought. Before I knew it, he had stepped inside the house, and passed into this room, and she followed him. I went on upstairs, without further concern about it."

"What time of day was that?"

"In the morning, about eleven."

"How long did he remain?"

"Not more than a quarter of an hour, at the most."

"You heard him, then, when he went away?"

"Yes, I heard him."

"Did you see Mrs. Montague immediately after that?"

"No; not until luncheon time."

"Did she mention her caller then?"

"She did not refer to the subject."

"Now, can you describe him to me?"

"Not better than to say that he was tall, and dark, and very handsome, I thought. He was dressed in the height of fashion."

"Was it your impression that she was glad to see him?"

"No; my impression was quite the opposite."

"Was he the only caller, aside from her husband, she has received?"

"Yes, sir. The only one, so far as I know."

"Did she go out much while she was here?"

"Not more than two or three times, and then she merely made little trips downtown to do some small shopping."

"Did she seem to be unhappy?"

"At times, yes. I think she was unhappy, but that she struggled bravely to conceal the fact from me."

"How about her correspondence? Did she receive many letters?"

"None at all that I remember. Indeed, I am quite sure that she had given directions to have her letters sent to some bank, or a solicitor, somewhere down in the city. I was, for some reason, under the impression that she preferred to keep her personal address a secret."

"Now, tell me how you happened to find the body."

"As I have said, I was greatly interested in some embroidery work I was doing, and for the moment I forgot that I was without a servant in the house. When I looked at the clock, and discovered that it was half-past one, I was dismayed, for it was already half an hour past our time for luncheon."

"I understand."

"I threw my work aside, and hurried down the stairs, to prepare the luncheon, and, as I passed the door which opens into the conservatory, I opened it and went in, with the intention of making some apology for the delay."

"Yes."

"Mrs. Montague was lying upon the couch—a favorite position of hers when reading since she has been here. I thought she was asleep, and I tiptoed over, to make certain.

"Even then I did not realize what had happened until I was quite near to her, when I saw that her eyes were open and staring, and that she was dead.

"At first I was too frightened to move or to speak. I could not even cry out, and her dead eyes stared at me so strangely and so horribly that, without volition of my own, but obeying some impulse, I closed down the lids of her eyes, and held them there for several moments before I really became conscious of what I was doing.

"Then I remember that I cried out, and that I ran from the house like one pursued, and I did not stop running until I arrived at my husband's office."

"It was a terrible shock to you, Mrs. Sylvester?"

"It was awful, sir—simply awful!"

"Would you know Mr. Montague if you should see him again?"

"Certainly I would. I admitted him, and, when he said who he was, I took a good look at him."

"You will be able to identify him, if he is arrested, will you not?"

"Yes, sir, I will."

"Would you like to ask any questions, inspector?" asked Nick, turning to O'Brien.

"Yes, a few, although you have pretty thoroughly covered the ground. Mrs. Sylvester, can you tell me how Montague was dressed?"

"In a suit of gray tweed, I think."

"What sort of a hat did he wear?"

"A derby."

"What was his demeanor—his manner—when you admitted him?"

"Well, sir, I did not notice it at the time, but now that you speak of it, I should say that he was laboring under some kind of excitement. He acted, in a word, very much as a person might do who had been running, but who had stopped long enough to have regained his breath, although the effects of the exertion were still present."

"That is a very good description. Now, you have said that Mrs. Montague flew into a passion when you announced that her husband was here. I wish——"

"I don't think, sir, that I am precisely correct about that. I should have said that she seemed greatly annoyed and somewhat frightened, and that she cried out, in a sort of passion, that she would not see him."

"Tell me exactly what she did say."

"She said: 'Paul Montague here? I will not see him! Tell him to go away, and never to come back, for I will not have anything to do with him.'"

"And then he brushed past you, did he?"

"Yes; he had followed me through the hall."

"What did he say when he did that?"

"He said: 'Nadja! Nadja! For God's sake, hear me! It is all a mistake, and I know it now! Hear me, I beg of you!'"

"What more was said between them in your hearing?"

"Nothing more. Mrs. Montague drew herself up haughtily when her husband addressed her in the words I have just used, and neither of them uttered a word after that while I was within hearing."

"What were your impressions of the man—I mean, of his intentions toward his wife—at the time?"

"Why, of one who had committed some act of folly, and who had come to plead for forgiveness."

"He did not, then, impress you as one who was bent on the commission of a crime?"

"Not at all. I did not think of such a thing."

"And, when you discovered the body of Mrs. Montague, what were your first impressions about that?"

"I don't know that I had any, sir; but it certainly did not occur to me at that moment that her husband had killed her, if that is what you mean."

"I think, Carter," said the inspector, turning to the detective, "that I will agree with you in one aspect of this case, and that is that there is a very large 'nigger' in the old fence, somewhere. But the case is very black against the husband."

"Ay," said Nick; "and, if I am not greatly mistaken, it will grow blacker as we proceed; but, all the same, I cannot think that he killed her."

CHAPTER III.

A CASE WITHIN A CASE.

Now, in order that the reader may understand precisely the situation of affairs concerning the murder of Nadja Montague, we will hark back for a moment to the circumstances which took Nick Carter to that house, in company with the inspector.

The dead body of the young woman, as will be remembered, was discovered by Mrs. Sylvester at half-past one in the afternoon, and it was ten minutes later when she staggered into her husband's office and told him what she had found.

Mr. Sylvester immediately telephoned to the police station, and the captain there immediately notified headquarters.

It was merely an accident that Nick Carter happened to be seated with Inspector O'Brien in his private office at the time, and, of course, he accompanied the chief of the detective bureau when he went to Washington

Heights in response to the summons; but it was half-past two when they arrived at the house where the murder had been committed.

An hour had already elapsed since the discovery of the body, and there was no way of determining, even approximately, when the deed was done, save that Nadja was killed sometime between the hours of ten-thirty and one.

Nick recognized the features of the young woman the moment he entered the room where the body was lying, and to say that he was astonished but feebly expresses the emotions he experienced at that time.*

From that moment we know all that took place.

When the questioning of Mrs. Sylvester was finished, and after a moment or two of silence following it, Nick asked, quietly:

"May I make a suggestion, inspector?"

"I wish you would do so, Nick," was the quick reply.

"Then I will ask Mrs. Sylvester to conduct you to the room that was occupied by Mrs. Montague, and to give you the opportunity to go through her effects thoroughly. It is more than likely that you will find some letter or document there which will add materially to the information we already possess. While you are employed at that I will return, alone, to the conservatory, and make a more thorough investigation there, on my own hook. I can do it much better alone than if others are present to observe me."

"It is a good idea, Nick; or, rather, two good ideas."

He followed Mrs. Sylvester from the room, and then Nick, after telling Mr. Sylvester that there was no reason why he should not return to his office, if he wished to do so, and also cautioning the two officers of police about their duties at the door, he assured the captain of the precinct that he would call at the station house before he went downtown again and went to the room where the body of Nadja Montague was lying.

He closed and fastened the door after he entered the room, for he had no wish to be disturbed during this investigation.

He knew that he still had almost an hour before the coroner would arrive at the house, for, when called upon by the inspector over the telephone, that official had stated the time when he would arrive.

Without having any good reason for his opinion—for the facts, as discovered thus far, were all arrayed against him—Nick Carter believed that Nadja's husband was innocent of this awful crime.

It must be remembered that he had already stated to the inspector that he had known the dead woman a long time; that he knew her in India; that he was aware of her antecedents, and that, before the slightest evidence had been found to connect Paul Montague with the crime, he had made the bald statement that he believed he knew who had done the murder.

He had even gone so far as to name the man he believed to be responsible for the crime, and had not hesitated to mention so great a personage as the rajah of Matarapur, surnamed Jaharazubar.

It was after that when the damaging evidence against the husband had been found; and it was still later when all that evidence had been supported by the testimony of Mrs. Sylvester.

"It would be like the hellish ingenuity of that Indian prince to commit this deed, or to order it done for him, and then to arrange a chain of circumstantial evidence which would point the finger of suspicion toward the man who had married her.

"And that tall, dark chap who called upon Nadja immediately after her arrival here—the description tallies precisely with Maitland Carruthers—the Maitland Carruthers who once so nearly killed me, and whom I know to be hand-in-glove with the rajah."

He shook his head in perplexity as he closed and locked the door, and then he paused just inside the room, and began his old plan of studying his surroundings thoroughly from a single point of vantage before entering upon a more thorough investigation.

Not a thing, save what has already been mentioned, had been touched in that room.

Both the inspector and Nick Carter understood the importance of the non-disturbance of detail in matters of this kind, and, therefore, they had gone about the room with careful tread, and still more careful fingers.

And now Nick stood at the door, with his back toward it, looking and thinking.

It seemed to him almost as if Nadja should open her eyes and speak to him—as if it were in her power to tell him all about the mystery of her death, so that there would be no mystery remaining; but he knew only too well that she would never speak again.

But, although he looked at everything within the range of his vision, with that intense gaze which left nothing undiscovered, he saw nothing; that is, he saw nothing which could suggest more than he already knew.

Many minutes he stood there silently; then he altered his position, and studied anew, from another point, but the result was the same.

Half a dozen times he changed his position, but each time it was with the same result, and he had about arrived at the decision that, if another person than the husband of Nadja had entered that room bent upon mischief, that person had left absolutely no clew behind.

I say he had about arrived at that decision, and he was at that moment standing close to the head of the couch upon which the body was lying.

It was then that, lowering his gaze to the body, he started, for he saw something which interested him.

*Read No. 454 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "The Great Orloff Ruby."

It was a very slight thing in itself, for it was nothing more than a very slight indenture, almost too faint to be seen at all, upon the skin of the dead woman's forehead.

Instantly he had out his magnifying glass, and bent nearer, to examine the spot more closely.

Reader, if you will wrap a handkerchief rather tightly around your wrist, or press it firmly against your own forehead, holding it there for a time, you will discover, when you take it away, that the mark of a wrinkle in that kerchief, or of the fabric itself, is imprinted there; and, if you will stop to consider for a moment, you will realize that, if death should ensue during the time of the making of that impression—sudden death, I mean—the indentation, or imprint, thus made will remain as mute evidence of what has been done. There is no circulation of blood under the skin then to restore it to its natural condition.

It was just such an imprint as that which Nick discovered, and which he at once examined more closely with the aid of his glass.

It was a little thing—a very little thing, indeed—but it interested the detective out of all proportion to its seeming importance, and when he rose to an upright position again, and returned the glass to his pocket, there was a grim smile of satisfied opinion upon his face.

And then he did a strange thing.

He left the room at once, locking the door behind him as he went out, leaving the key in the lock, however, and cautioning the officer outside not to open it without his permission. And then he did the thing which might be regarded as strange.

He went at once to the front door of the house—the door which communicated with the outside world.

He opened it, and swung it away back on its hinges, and then he drew from his pocket his little case of steel tools, and, having selected the screwdriver from among them and fixed it in place, he began to remove the lock from its morticed receptacle in the door.

The lock removed, he carried it into the parlor, near to the window, and with great care began to take it apart, piece by piece, until the sections of it were all spread out before him upon a sheet of paper in the strong light which came in through the window.

That done, he again had recourse to his magnifying glass, and for almost half an hour he devoted himself to that seeming useless examination.

You could have discovered nothing from the expression of his face, had you been permitted to observe him during this time, at the end of which he put the lock together again, and finally returned it to its place in the front door, intact.

He had just completed this task when the coroner arrived, and, without calling the inspector, who was still engaged on the floor above, he accompanied the coroner into the room of death, explaining what was necessary as he did so.

But he closed and locked the door on the inside when they entered, and he drew the coroner at once to the head of the couch, where he produced his glass, and, holding it over the imprint on Nadja's forehead, asked the coroner to examine what he saw, and tell him what he thought about it.

The coroner at once confessed that he was amazed.

He held the glass for a long time over the spot; then he held it aside for a moment, and continued the examination with his naked eye; then he brought the glass into use again, and finally he turned to the detective, and said:

"Carter, I should never have seen that spot at all without my attention having been called to it. I don't know how you happened to discover it."

"It is an important part of my profession to see such things," replied the detective, quietly. "Tell me what you make of it."

"Why, seen through the glass, it is as plain as day."

"What is as plain as day? Tell me. I want another opinion than my own."

"It is plain that a handkerchief has been pressed heavily and firmly against that poor girl's forehead before she was stabbed, and that it was held there for a moment or two after the blow was struck."

"Thank you. That was exactly my opinion, and I wished to have it approved by you. Now, is that dagger located so that it has pierced her heart?"

"I should say that it has done so, without the shadow of a doubt."

"Would death, in that case, have been instantaneous? Or, rather, is death always instant in cases of this kind?"

"Death is apt to ensue almost instantly," replied the coroner; "but I am not prepared to say that it is always the case, or even that it is the rule. I know of one case where a bullet passed entirely through the heart, and the patient lived, and recovered. That was, of course, an exceptional case."

"I wish to call your attention now particularly to the features of this dead woman."

"Yes."

"How do they impress you?"

"As being of extraordinary beauty."

"I did not refer to the beauty of the woman, but to the utter repose of her features."

"I understand."

"Does that fact impress you at all?"

"Most certainly."

"Will you tell me how, without forcing me to suggest it to your mind?"

"Why, as if she were sleeping."

"Nothing more than that?"

"Eh? Oh! I see what you mean now."

"It is not what I mean, but what you mean, that I wish to get at. You have been a student of physiognomy, as well as of physiology, have you not?"

"Certainly."

"Then, from the standpoint of physiognomy alone, tell me what impressions you get from the appearance of this dead face."

"Well, frankly, Carter—and I think, as a matter of fact, that your questions have suggested the idea to me, at that—frankly, I get the impression that the woman was unconscious when she was stabbed."

"Precisely. Exactly. Now, although my questions have suggested that idea to you, are you convinced in your own mind that that opinion is the correct one?"

"I am. When I say that your questions suggested the idea to me, I mean by that that I do not think it would have occurred to me had you not suggested it, but that it is, nevertheless, undoubtedly a fact."

"Would an autopsy determine, without a doubt, whether you are correct, or at fault?"

"It would."

"Then may I ask you to make an autopsy for that purpose?"

"I shall certainly do so."

"Now, another thing, doctor—if this woman had been struck with the dagger while she was standing on her feet, or while she was seated in a chair, entertaining some person who was present with her, would it have been possible, in your opinion, for the murderer to have put her here on this couch where we find her after she was dead, and to have not only arranged her attitude so perfectly, but without the expression of her features showing somewhat of the thing that had happened?"

"Decidedly not."

"Thank you. All this is in keeping with my own theories. I will leave the matter entirely in your hands now; but you may say to the undertaker whom you employ that I will settle all the bills connected with this affair, and that I desire that the body be interred in my own plot at Woodlawn."

Inspector O'Brien was descending the stairs when Nick left the conservatory, and they met in the hallway.

"Well," asked Nick, "what have you discovered?"

"A little, but not very much. And you?"

"I have discovered a great deal, Steve."

"What?"

"I have discovered that Paul Montague did not murder his wife."

"You have? That is interesting, for I have found what, to my mind, is indubitable evidence that he did kill her."

"I have not a doubt of it; more, you will discover still stronger evidence, which will lead to the same conclusion—evidence which would have convinced me, also, had I not possessed previous knowledge of the history of the dead girl which led me to make examination along lines I never would have thought about had it not been for that fact."

"I must confess that I do not understand you, Nick."

"That is not your fault. I would not understand it myself if I did not possess that previous knowledge as a basis upon which to work. But Paul Montague did not kill his wife, although the district attorney would have no trouble to convict him upon the evidence as at present in our possession. This is a case within a case, Steve. The evidence against Montague is only the shell, and I am going to dig deeper for the meat of the nut."

CHAPTER IV.

THE RAJAH'S REVENGE.

"Come along home with me," said Nick to the inspector, as they left the house together and hastened toward the subway station. "We will go over the matter together there."

And, after that, the subject was not referred to again until they were closeted in Nick Carter's study.

"Now, inspector," said the detective then, "if you don't mind, let's have your story first. Before I tell you what I discovered, I would like to know just what you found, for I am sure that in some way it will have a bearing upon my own theories of the murder."

"Just let me use your telephone first, Nick. I want to find out if my men arrested Montague."

"Go ahead."

The inspector pulled the receiver toward him, and half a dozen questions and replies passed between him and the officer in charge during his absence at the bureau.

"They didn't get him, Nick," he said, at last, replacing the receiver and moving his chair over nearer to the detective.

"No?" replied Nick, non-committally. "Why not?"

"He had gone, bag and baggage, when they arrived at the hotel."

"Is there any trace of him?"

"Not one; but my men are scouring the city in search of him."

"I am sorry they did not find him," mused Nick, "for I desired very much to have him where I could talk with him."

"Oh, he will be found all right, before the day is over, never fear."

"Perhaps so. I hope so. And now for what you found in Nadja Montague's rooms."

"I found three letters which seem to bear upon the case. Two of them were from her husband, and the third was signed with the name of Maitland Carruthers."

"Ah, indeed! Did you bring the letters with you?"

"Certainly."

"Will you let me see that one from Carruthers, please?"

"Sure. You are to see all of them, are you not?"

"I mean that I wish to see the Carruthers letter first."

"Here it is. Read it aloud. I would like to go over it again, also."

The detective took the letter in his hand, and read:

"'My Dear Mrs. Montague: It is with profound regret for what has happened that I write to you. I know that an apology cannot undo what has been done, but, if there is anything that I can do to atone for the wrong I did you—for the compromising position in which I unwittingly placed you last night—command me, I beg. I need not assure you that your husband sought to kill me, for you know that; but I must tell you that he swore on every oath he knew that he would follow you to the end of the earth to kill you. I very much fear that he meant what he said, too. As for me, I shall follow you, also, but not to annoy you again, I assure you of that; but merely to act as your protector. My love for you—which you have always scorned—must be my excuse for that. When you are in danger, I will be near at hand, and always I will be, faithfully yours,

"'Maitland Carruthers.'"

"There is no date, and there is neither stamp nor postmark on the envelope," said Nick, returning the letter to the inspector. "We have no means of telling when this letter was delivered to her, or where, or how."

"No; that is very true."

Nick reached out for the envelope again, and turned it over in his hand. Then he said:

"Ah, yes, we have an idea, too. There is a number on the back of the envelope, in ink, and that means that it was delivered by a messenger, in London. Here it is. Now, let me see the other letters."

They were given to him, both contained in envelopes without stamp or postmark, and neither with a number on the back, as in the case of the letter from Carruthers.

As before, neither was dated, and, opening the first one, Nick read aloud again:

"'Nadja: I am more than ever satisfied of your guilt. Nothing can convince me to the contrary. When I think of all the time you passed in India in the company of that man, and of the circumstances under which I discovered you last night, I am mad. Mad, I tell you, and it seems to me that I must do one of two things—that I must either kill you or kill myself. To do the latter would be merely to open the way for you and him, leaving no impediment in your path. I have not decided which I will do—yet. It would be better, perhaps, if you would consent to see me, and talk with me. I will promise you immunity from harm during that interview if you will consent to it. I will call again to-morrow morning at ten.

"'Montague.'"

The second letter was as follows:

"'Since you have declined to see me at all, and have stated your intention of leaving the country forever, and of freeing yourself from me when you arrive in America, I wish you to know that I will pursue you wherever you go, and that some day there must be a terrible reckoning between us for the life you have ruined . . .

"'Montague.'"

"Well, Nick, what do you think of that, eh?" asked the inspector.

"They make things look black for Montague, don't they?"

"I should say so. They are almost as conclusive as if we had found another confessing to the murder."

"But not quite, eh?"

"No; not quite, I will admit."

"Did you discover anything more?"

"Yes; this."

The inspector placed a small parcel, that was wrapped in a bit of newspaper, in the detective's hand, and, casting aside the paper, Nick discovered a dagger that was the exact counterpart in every particular—save for the missing pearl—of the weapon which had pierced Nadja Montague's heart.

"Where did you find this?" asked Nick.

"In one of the trunks in her room."

"It is an exact copy of the other, isn't it?"

"It certainly is."

"And that suggests that the two were obtained at the same place, and time, and by the same person, doesn't it?"

"That was my idea."

"And all that suggests—what does it suggest to you?"

"Why, it suggests that one or the other of these two people—I mean Paul Montague and his wife—owned those daggers. That, doubtless, she brought them with her from India, or that her mother did so, long years ago. That Nadja retained possession of one of them, and that the husband owned, or, at least, held, the other one, and that, when he decided to kill her, he chose that instrument for the act."

"That is certainly a logical deduction, under the circumstances."

"Don't you agree with me?"

"I would do so if it were not for other things which have come to my notice."

"Humph! Well, don't you think it is about time for you to tell me what those other things are?"

"Yes, I do."

"Let's hear it all, Nick."

"Very well; but I want you to bear in mind that in the first half of what I shall tell you—that which has to do directly with the actual act of murder by which Nadja came to her death—the coroner entirely agrees with me."

"Oh, he does, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, what is it?"

"Nadja Montague was lying upon the couch, engaged in reading, when she was approached by the man who murdered her."

"Well, what of that?"

"Do we need to ask each other that question, inspector? We both know how Paul Montague was received, when he presented himself at the house where his wife was stop-

ping; we both know in what spirit she encountered him when he pushed his way past Mrs. Sylvester and entered the room. There was no sleepiness about that, was there?"

"N-no."

"Nor do I think that she was in a frame of mind which would have induced her to take her book and throw herself upon the couch while he was present in the room."

"He might have gone outside and waited in the hall until she supposed that she was rid of him," suggested the inspector.

"I have thought of that, but the idea is not tenable."

"Why not?"

"Nadja knew that there were no servants in the house. Doubtless, she also knew that Mrs. Sylvester, upon leaving them together, would go directly to her own room, and stay there with her embroidery. It follows, therefore, that, when Montague took his departure, she either accompanied him to the outer door, or at least that she went far enough to see that he did pass through it."

"Well, that is a good enough argument, but, after all, it is only an argument. Haven't you any facts?"

"Plenty of them, when I get to them."

"What is the next point?"

"I have said that she was lying on the couch, engaged in reading, when she was approached by the man who killed her, but I have not said that she was stabbed while sleeping."

"I understood your remark to include that idea."

"No; she was approached so stealthily that she did not know that another person was present in the room. You will remember that the head of the couch is toward the door by which entrance to the room is obtained."

"Yes."

"She was unconscious of that approach."

"Well, go on."

"The man, when he was close enough to touch her, reached out with his hand and pressed a very fine meshed cambric handkerchief over her eyes and nose and mouth, and he held it in that position until she was unconscious. Unconsciousness must have ensued almost upon the instant. It is likely that a drug was used which acts much more quickly than chloroform—and there are many such drugs known to the adepts in India. It is one of them which the fakirs use when they bury themselves in the ground for thirty days."

"How do you know all this?"

"I will come to that point presently. You noticed, did you not, that I emphasized the statement that the handkerchief used by the murderer was of very fine mesh?"

"Yes."

"Here is the handkerchief we found on the desk in that room—the one with the initials of Paul Montague upon it. Look at it. The mesh is quite coarse."

"Yes; I see that, all right."

"It is not the handkerchief that was used in rendering her unconscious. I know that, and I have proof of it, as you shall presently see. In a word, the kerchief that was used in drugging her left its imprint upon her forehead where the murderer pressed hardest upon it with the heel of his hand. My glass brought out the marks distinctly, and I was able to study the marks carefully."

"You are getting interesting now, Nick."

"I knew that I should interest you, but I have hardly begun as yet."

"Well, go on."

"Nadja was totally unconscious from the effects of the drug when she was stabbed. In this statement the coroner entirely agrees with me, but all the same he intends to make an autopsy in order to determine that fact without doubt."

"How do you argue that all this lets the husband out of the deal?"

"Because she would not have been lying on the couch for him to drug her; because he could not have caught her in his arms and have administered the drug in that way without leaving some evidences of a struggle—for in that case a struggle must have ensued, however short; because, even if that were possible, he could not, thereafter, have placed her upon the couch, have arranged her dress and draperies as he found them, and have calmed the expression of her features as we discovered her. But, more than all, because husbands, when they kill their wives, do not kill in that way. If he struck her at all, he would have done so in the excess of passion. If he had drugged her first, he would never have stabbed her afterward, and if he had stabbed her at all, he would have left her as she fell. As the case stands, I know that she was drugged first and afterward deliberately stabbed to death while she was utterly unconscious."

"By Jove, Nick, I believe you are right!" exclaimed the inspector.

"I don't think that I am very far wrong. Now, before I go into the other matters I discovered while you were upstairs, I might as well tell you what my theory of the case is, and what I have determined to establish, if it can be established; and I think it can."

"I wish you would do so."

"I believe in what I told you before we found the handkerchief and the letter on the desk, and before we knew that Nadja's husband was in this country; that is to say, I believe this murder to be the carrying out of the rajah's revenge—the rajah of Matarapur. I have never yet told you all that story, but suffice it for the present to say that there was a time when he intended to make Nadja his wife; that she escaped from him; that at the same time he lost possession of the great Orloff ruby, which is known to him as 'The Demon's Eye,' and that doubtless he has attributed all his misfortunes to her influence.

"I will say one thing more on that point. Among the high-caste rajahs of the independent states of India, there exists an abhorrence of the infusion of foreign blood into the veins of their old families. This abhorrence amounts to fanaticism. More than one innocent man and woman have been murdered for no other reason than because their blood was tainted in that way. Nadja was half English.

"Now, I have no doubt that Jaharazubar, the rajah, really coveted this woman for his wife. He lost her. Another man married her. That other man was English. If the rajah could murder her, or have her murdered, which is the most likely case, and at the same time cast suspicion upon the husband, so that he would be tried and convicted for the murder, his revenge would be tenfold attractive, and he would, as it were, kill two birds with one stone at the same time. Do you follow me?"

"Perfectly."

"Accordingly he laid his plans with care?"

"But where does the man Carruthers come in?"

"I am coming to that point now," replied the detective.

CHAPTER V.

THE SURPRISING EVIDENCE OF A LOCK.

"What is the point?" asked the inspector.

"The rajah's first move was to compromise the woman in some way. We don't know how he did it, but that he succeeded in accomplishing it is proved by this letter to her signed by Maitland Carruthers."

"I see the point."

"He managed to compromise her, and to do it in such a way that her husband was a witness to it all. Then ensued the quarrel."

"Yes."

"We know by her letter to her husband, which we found on the desk in her room—a letter which, by the way, I am of the opinion was opened and read by the murderer after he killed her, and which he decided to leave where he found it as additional evidence against Montague—we know by that letter that her proud spirit so intensely resented her husband's acts and words that she resolved on the spot to leave him forever. I think that letter explains itself."

"I agree with you there."

"Well, that is the plot against them both, in a nutshell. That is my theory of the case. I believe that Nadja was killed by, or through, the instrumentality of the rajah, and that the evidence against her husband is merely the result of the devilish ingenuity of the man."

"But again, where does Carruthers come in?"

"It was through Carruthers' willing assistance that she was compromised. He did not mean that she should be murdered. He intended to save her. He says so in that letter on the table in front of you. It is true that he states there that it is his purpose to save her from the wrath of her husband, but what he means is that he intends to save her from the revenge of the rajah, and to possess her for himself alone. That is the kernel in the nut of his letter."

"Was he in love with her?"

"He says so plainly enough in that letter; but more than that, if ever I saw a man's eyes bespeak almost uncontrollable passion for a woman, it was when I saw him look at her once on a platform in front of the palace of the rajah, in India. I think I read this case correctly."

"I am beinning to think with you, Nick."

The detective smiled, well pleased. Then he said:

"And I have not told you half, yet."

"Tell me the rest now, then."

"It is this: When I found the imprint of the kerchief upon Nadja's forehead, and had satisfied my own mind that another man than the husband had committed the murder, it followed, logically, that another man had entered that room after the departure of Paul Montague."

"Of course."

"I argued more than that. First, I recalled the coincidental fact that both of Mrs. Sylvester's servants had left without notice the preceding day, and that suggested to me that possibly they had been bribed to leave at that time and in that manner. This, you know, would leave the house unguarded during the day, with only the intended victim and Mrs. Sylvester inside.

"Next, I argued that the assassin would select an hour in the forenoon for his work, because it would be almost certain that new servants had not been secured by that time, and that possibly Mrs. Sylvester might be out in search of new ones, thus leaving Nadja alone in the house.

"Next, that the assassin must have seen Paul Montague when he entered the house, and that, therefore, he waited until the husband came out again before making his descent upon his victim.

"Next, that doubtless from his place of watching, probably across the street, or at least over the brow of the hill, he could see that Mrs. Sylvester was in her own room, far removed from the conservatory where Nadja was reading, and if he did that, he knew that whatever slight noise he might make would not reach her ears.

"Next—and this is an important item—when the moment for him to enter the house arrived, he was compelled to do so by the use of a skeleton key, or with some sort of a pick-lock with which he could throw the latch of the door. Fortunately, he manufactured his own pick-lock out of a piece of wire, or from a hairpin, and he used it expertly, too."

"May I ask how it is that you are so well acquainted with that fact—if it is a fact?" asked the inspector, with just a touch of sarcasm.

"Easily enough; merely because I took the lock from

the door, took it all apart, and made a thorough examination of it inside, through my powerful glass. It is written inside that lock as plainly as if it were in print that the lock had recently been opened by some means other than by the use of the regular key, and that the agent employed was a wire. It scratched the tumblers and the metal surrounding the tumblers indelibly. Now, what do you think of all that?"

"I think it is great."

"You see, Steve, I know that some person tampered with that lock and opened that door, this morning. We know that Montague was admitted in the usual way, and I now say that this fact of the picking of the lock, taken in connection with the other information we have, proves conclusively that the murder was committed by a man who entered the house after the departure of Paul Montague."

"But it does not prove that Paul Montague did not return and pick the lock himself."

"No; it does not. But what a senseless thing that would have been for him to do, would it not?"

"Yes; I think it would."

"If he had any intention of killing his wife he would have done it while he was there in the conservatory with her in the first place. Montague is not the murderer."

"I agree with you, Nick; I don't think he is."

"All the same, I am sorry that your men did not succeed in arresting him. I have an idea that he could assist us materially in this case if he were where we could get at him."

"He will be found before night."

"Somehow I doubt if you will find him."

"You wait and see."

"There is one thing which I wish you would have done at once, inspector," said the detective. after a moment or two spent in silent thought.

"What is that?"

"I wish you would send out a couple of your best men and collar Carruthers."

"What for?"

"For the murder."

"You don't mean that you think he did the act, do you?"

"No; I know that he did not do it; but it won't do any harm to charge him with it, for I am certain that he knows who did do it—if he knows so soon that she has been killed. Just gather him in and place him *incommunicado*, as the Spaniards have it. That is to say, don't permit anybody to see him or to talk with him until after I have had a chance at him. I will take the consequences, if there are any."

"It shall be done if he can be found."

"He is an insolent scoundrel. That is proved by his presence in the city at all, where I did not suppose he would dare to come."

"Have you any idea where he can be found?"

"Not the slightest; only it is safe to say that he would stop at one of the best hotels. Probably he would use an alias, also, and trust to his own sagacity to pass unrecognized. I shall make a little search for him myself."

"What is your idea of tracing the murderer, Nick?"

"Why, we have got to do it through Montague, or through Carruthers—one or the other. I could not discover a clew more than I have told you. The rest of what I have said is all surmise, of course, but it is surmise that is based on such secure foundation that I have not a doubt of its truth."

"Nor I. Our game is, then, to gather those two men into the net; eh?"

"Yes; both of them, and the quicker, the better. I have an idea that, as soon as the murder is generally known, Carruthers will go to the house, or to the undertaker, where the body will be taken as soon as the coroner orders it removed. I don't anticipate any trouble about getting him. It is Montague who worries me."

"Why? You have made that statement, in effect, two or three times, and I would like to be told why."

"Because, Steve, I have an intuitive feeling that the man will shoot himself, if he has not already done so, or jump into the river, or kill himself in some way."

"Great Scott! what makes you think that?"

"His letters which you brought here. Don't you remember that he says in one of them that he is in doubt whether to kill her or himself? He did not kill her, and I don't believe he ever had a serious thought of doing so; but the letter does suggest to me that he had serious thoughts of making away with himself."

"He has probably gotten over that by this time."

"You forget that then he believed her guilty of something—we don't know what—and that his words to her when he entered the conservatory where she was this morning proved that he was now satisfied of her innocense. 'It is all a terrible mistake,' he said to her, according to Mrs. Sylvester."

"Well?"

"Notwithstanding that he found out that she would have nothing more to do with him; that she would never forgive him for his suspicions and his doubt of her truth and purity; that the words, 'the end,' had been written to the story of their lives together. I do not say that he has killed himself, but I do fear that he might have done so, and I wish he was at this moment under arrest."

The inspector started to his feet.

"I'll go out on the case myself," he said. "I'll turn the whole department out, if necessary, to find him, and, if he's alive, I'll find him before the day is past."

"That's the way to talk. I will also go out and look around. But, in your eagerness to find him, don't neglect Carruthers."

"I won't. Don't you fret."

A moment later Nick Carter was alone in his study.

"Poor Nadja!" he murmured to himself. "So beautiful, so young, so charming, so good! The tragedy of your life is terrible!"

He was a long time silent after that, and was only aroused from his reverie when his valet, Joseph, made his appearance and announced that a gentleman was waiting in the reception room to see him.

"Who is he, Joseph?" asked Nick. "What does he want? I cannot be disturbed just now."

"I don't know what he wants, sir, but he looks as if he was in terrible trouble. He said his name was Montague."

"What!"

The detective leaped to his feet in amazement.

"What sort of a looking man is he, Joseph?" he asked.

"He is very tall and big, sandy complexion, smooth-shaven, and——"

"That will do. Thank you. Say to him that I will be down in a moment. And, Joseph!"

"Yes, sir."

"I want you to stand close to the front door until I do come down, and, if Mr. Montague should attempt to leave, you persuade him to wait, somehow, if you have to knock him on the head to do it."

"Very good, sir."

"This is certainly a piece of luck," mused Nick. "I wonder if he knows about the death of his wife? I wonder. I hardly think so. At all events, I will act on the supposition that he does not until I have heard what he has to say. Montague, eh? I am glad that the inspector went away before he came."

Then the detective went slowly down the stairs.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RAJAH'S DIABOLICAL PLOT.

When Nick Carter entered the reception room, the man who was there awaiting him rose and stepped forward.

Without preamble or introduction, he announced himself at once.

"You are Mr. Carter, I suppose?"

Nick nodded.

"I have been all day, sir, endeavoring to ascertain your address. Half an hour ago I met a policeman who knew, and he directed me here. My name is Paul Montague. I am an Englishman, and have only been in this country a few days."

"Yes?" said Nick. "What can I do for you?"

"I don't know that you can do anything for me, Mr. Carter, and yet I have an idea that you may be able to do a great deal. Did you ever hear my name before?"

"I think I received wedding cards from London, some time ago, which bore your name," replied the detective, smiling.

He thought in that moment that he had never seen a man upon whose face intense mental suffering was more plainly depicted, and he almost shuddered to think of the added pain he would soon be compelled to inflict upon this man, who was already bowed to the earth with grief, for he knew in that first moment of their meeting that Montague was as yet ignorant of the death of his wife.

"Won't you be seated?" continued Nick, without a perceptible pause.

Montague sank into a chair, and for a moment did not speak; but at last, recovering himself, he asked:

"Do you remember my wife, Mr. Carter? She was Nadja Covington, you know."

"Certainly I remember her."

"You were in India at the same time. You rescued her from the power of the rajah of Matarapur, did you not?"

"Yes; I was instrumental in that affair."

"We have quarreled, Mr. Carter. My wife has left me, and she refuses to return. She is even now in this country. Have you seen her, perhaps?"

"There are several statements and questions all in one breath," said Nick, slowly. He realized that he must temporize if he succeeded in securing from this man the information he sought. "I will reply to the questions as best I may. No; I have not spoken with her since I parted with her on the return from India. I am greatly surprised and very much shocked to hear that you have quarreled and separated, for I know that she loved you—loved you very dearly, sir."

"I offended her beyond forgiveness, Mr. Carter. Her proud spirit could not overlook my transgression."

"I am very sorry. Did you come here for the purpose of telling me about it?"

"Yes; in the hope that you might influence her to forgive me. She has held an exalted opinion of you, sir, and I am convinced that, if you would intercede for me, all might yet be well. I realize that this is a very strange errand to bring me here to you, but you must pardon me—I feel that you will understand me when I tell you that I am almost crazed by the thought that I have killed her love for me forever."

"Don't let us think that it is as bad as that," said Nick. "Come upstairs to my study, where we will be more secluded, and then you shall tell me all about it."

Seated in the study, with Paul Montague occupying the chair lately vacated by the inspector, the detective opened the subject anew.

"Now, Mr. Montague," he said, "if you will tell me all about it, perhaps that would be the wisest course to pursue."

"That is precisely what I came here to do."

"Very well. I am all attention."

"Do you remember a man whose name is Maitland Carruthers?"

"I do."

"He was in India at the same time you were, was he not?"

"Yes."

"And he had been instrumental in the theft of the Orloff ruby which was sold to that concern by my wife's mother; no?"

"That is correct."

"Did you know that he followed her to London after her escape from the rajah?"

"No; I did not know that."

"He did so. He pursued her relentlessly. He used to lay in wait for her, and he held several forced interviews with her in that way before our marriage."

"Why didn't you knock him on the head?"

"Because I knew nothing about it at the time. In fact, I knew nothing about it until quite recently, and—here, sir, is the crucial point of the whole affair—when I did know about it, the knowledge came to me in such a distorted fashion and shape that it was not the truth I learned, but a mass of falsehoods, so cleverly woven together, and with such an appearance of truth, that a saint would have been convinced of their verity."

"What more?"

"Please be patient with me, Mr. Carter; I think that you will sympathize with me when you have heard the story to the end."

"I have not a doubt of it, Mr. Montague."

"Thank you for that, sir. This Carruthers wrote her a mass of letters, it seems. Fervent love letters, they were, couched in such phrase as makes me blush to think of them. He was ingenious about them, too, for he always managed that she should not know that they came from him until she had opened them and seen the inside. I now know that she never had the slightest use for him, and that she made effort to return his letters, and later, when that could not be done, to destroy them. Unfortunately, they were not destroyed, and ultimately they fell into my hands; that is, many of them did. I doubt if I saw them all."

"Well?"

"Mind you, all this time I was in complete ignorance of this man's acts. Had I known the truth, I would have killed him.

"He continued his persecutions of Nadja even after our marriage, and she was too proud, or too something, to take me into her confidence. I think her real reason for keeping me in ignorance was her fear that I would kill him, and thus get myself into trouble."

"Without a doubt."

"We had an Indian servant named Simrha, who one day mysteriously disappeared. Nadja was greatly exercised over the affair, but nothing that we could do threw any light upon his fate.

"He had been gone something more than a week, when, one day, I received a mysterious summons to go to the Old Slip Inn, at Greenwich, to be there exactly at three o'clock in the afternoon, to go to room twelve, on the second floor, without announcing myself, and to open the door and walk in without knocking, when I would discover the secret of Simrha's absence.

"I will confess that the letter did not appeal to me at all at first. I regarded it as a hoax, or a trap—for we had become convinced that the rajah had avenged himself on Simrha, and would some day try it on my wife, as well—but the thought that she might wish me to go influenced me, and I went.

"Before starting out, however, I took the precaution to return to my home in St. Johns Wood to tell my wife about it.

"She was not there, and her maid said that she had gone out an hour before, so I started for Greenwich.

"Well, sir, I arrived there at the appointed hour. I ascended to the second floor, as I had been directed to do. I opened the room door, and stepped inside, and in that moment I nearly died. What I saw before me was this:

"A man whom I had never seen before, but who I now know was Maitland Carruthers—a tall, handsome man—was standing in the middle of the room, with my wife in his arms, and he was showering kisses upon her face when I opened the door; and in the madness of the moment I believed that she was returning them.

"I started toward them, with murder in my heart, but something tripped me, and I fell. As I fell, Carruthers leaped upon me and pinned me down, and, although I struggled, I could not escape from him.

"I called out to him that I would kill him. I called out to Nadja that I would kill her, and, indeed, I meant it all.

"Then I heard a scurrying of feet, the slamming of the door, and then a handkerchief saturated with chloroform was pressed over my nostrils and mouth.

"When I came to my senses I was still lying on my face on the floor, but I was alone.

"I got upon my feet and staggered downstairs, where I drank brandy after brandy until I was both mad and stupefied with the fumes of it.

"Later, I had myself driven home, still drunk with the brandy I had swallowed.

"My wife was there, and, when I entered her presence, I gave her no opportunity to speak, but started in at once upon such a tirade of abuse that she could not listen, and finally she left the room without having uttered a word. I now know that she endeavored to explain all about the affair when I first entered, but that I gave her no opportunity to do so, and that I abused her so frightfully that she would say nothing after that.

"I went to my own rooms then; and there I found a letter on my desk, addressed in a strange hand, which told me to look through the desk in my wife's sitting room.

"I went there at once.

"She was there, but I paid no attention to her, going straight to the desk, as I had been directed to do, and I found there the letters I have already mentioned.

"I took them to my own rooms, and read them through, one by one, to the last one, and then, more inflamed than ever by my insensate anger, I again sought her.

"What I said then I do not remember. I know that I threatened her life. I know that I used language such as no man should use under any circumstances, and I saw her change from sorrow to anger, from anger to scorn, and from scorn to contempt before my eyes.

"Within an hour after that she had left our home.

"There, sir, is about all there is to tell of the story, save that I speedily discovered my errors.

"I say speedily, but I am hardly correct about that, for days passed before I did know the truth.

"It came to me first through her maid, who had gone away with her, but I did not believe the maid—then. Later I knew that she had spoken the truth.

"It does not matter how I discovered the inside of all the hellish plot against us, but, ultimately, I did know the truth, and the whole truth, and it was as I told you at the beginning—that is about the letters.

"As for the affair at the Old Slip Inn, Nadja had been enticed there by precisely the same means that were used in my case, and that was where she had gone when I went to our home to see her before starting out.

"The scheming villains had timed themselves well, and there was a watch outside for me.

"The rajah was there with the man Carruthers, and with them they had an Indian adept, who was skilled in hypnotic power.

"When Nadja arrived on the scene, she was seized and held, while the adept exerted his hellish power over her; but, notwithstanding that fact, she did not entirely succumb to his will, and she was struggling to free herself when I opened the door. She was sufficiently conscious at the time to know everything that was taking place, but without the power to cry out, or speak, or to warn me of the truth.

"Now, sir, some day, if you desire it, I will tell you the details of the story—how I found out the truth, and the whole truth. Just now does not seem to me to be the time for it.

"It is sufficient that I do know the truth, and that Nadja was the victim of as vile a plot as ever was concocted in the brain of man.

"That is the story.

"Nadja sailed for this country, and as soon as I knew where she had gone I followed her.

"I experienced some difficulty in ascertaining her address, but I found it at last. I wrote to her yesterday, and sent the letter to her by a messenger boy, but she recognized my handwriting on the envelope, and refused to receive it. She ordered the boy to take it back from whence it came.

"This morning I went to the house where she is staying to see her. I was determined that I would see her, and then, if she would not hearken to my plea, that I would kill myself.

"It was half-past ten when I arrived there. After I entered the house I overheard Nadja say that she would not see me, and I brushed past the woman who had admitted me and forced my way into the room where Nadja was—a sort of conservatory.

"The woman went away, and left us alone together. Nadja was as cold as ice. She would not reply to me at first, but she listened to my story to the end; and, when I finished the recital, she said to me, very calmly:

"'I am very sorry, Paul, but you must go away and leave me. We must part, here, forever. It is in my blood that I can never overlook your lack of confidence and trust in me. You have killed my love for you as effectually as if you had slain me. Go, and do not return.'

"Pleadings were of no avail, and at last I came away, heartbroken."

He covered his face with his hands, and sobbed aloud as he concluded his recital; and Nick, after waiting a moment, asked:

"Do you know what the time was when you came away and left her?"

"Yes; it was half-past eleven. I had been there an hour with her."

"You are sure about the time?"

"Yes; I am sure about it."

"And you have not heard what happened to your wife after you left her?"

"No," he said, raising his eyes in alarm. "Tell me. Did something happen to her?"

Nick left his chair and crossed the room until he stood directly in front of Montague. Then he placed his hands on the Englishman's shoulders, and looked him straight in the eyes.

"Paul Montague," he said, slowly, "you are a big, strong man. Can you be strong in spirit as well as in body? Are you man enough to withstand a terrible blow? Brace up now. It is a great trouble that has come to you, and you must meet it like a man. Meet it with all your strength and might. Bite on the bullet, Montague. Pull yourself together and prepare yourself for the hardest blow that was ever dealt a man."

Montague sat staring into the detective's eyes, incapable of speech, but, after a moment, he gasped out:

"Is—is she—is Nadja—dead?"

"Yes," said Nick, slowly, "she is dead."

Montague straightened up until he was taller than ever, and his chest swelled out until it seemed to be bursting. He clinched his hands until the knuckles were white from the pressure, and the blood stood in little spots under the skin. His jaws set rigidly, and then, without warning, he pitched forward and crashed to the floor on his face, like a dead man.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MYSTERIOUS CRAFT OFF ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-FIRST STREET.

A long, low, black-hulled, rakish-looking yacht, almost large enough to be yclept a steamship, was anchored in the Hudson River directly off One Hundred and Fifty-first Street, and the men and loungers along shore told Nick Carter, when he questioned them about her, that she had been there rather more than a week, but, beyond the fact that she was manned by dark-skinned foreigners, who might be Portuguese, or Spaniards, or Italians, or Egyptians—or, in fact, anything at all, save decent white men—no information could be obtained concerning her.

It was the afternoon of the day following the murder of Nadja when the detective asked the questions about the yacht—for he could see, with half an eye, that it was a private craft.

The explanation of his presence there can be told in a paragraph.

For reasons of his own, which he considered important, Nick had decided to say nothing to the inspector about the presence of Paul Montague in his house, and on the morning of this present day he had received a letter from O'Brien, which was as follows:

"I was not able to keep my word in the matter of apprehending Paul Montague before dark yesterday. In fact, my men have been able to get no trace of him whatever, and I begin to fear that he may have made away with himself, as you suggested. However, I have one bit of news for you.

"I turned the whole force upside down to be on the lookout for Carruthers, but, like Montague, he evaded me. Still, late in the afternoon, Conners ran across a fellow whom he believed might be Carruthers in disguise, and, with that idea in view, he took the trail and followed.

"The individual, whether it was Carruthers or not—finally went to the Battery, where he got aboard a launch, which appeared to be awaiting him, and was taken up the river at a rapid gait. Conners took a tug, which was not quite so fast, but which, however, kept the launch in view.

"Now, there is nothing more to this story, save that the launch ultimately delivered its passenger aboard of a private yacht named the *Howrah,* which lies in the Hudson River off One Hundred and Fifty-first Street. Conners abandoned the chase then, deeming it wise not to attempt to board the yacht, but I should not wonder if that is the hotel at which Carruthers is stopping, and the place where your friend (?) the rajah might also be found."

On receipt of this letter, Nick had at once notified the inspector that Montague was at his house, under the care of a trained nurse and two doctors, and that, if the man lived through the attack of brain fever from which he was suffering, it would be little short of a miracle; and he added, at the close of the letter:

"And now, if you will call off your dogs of war and leave the matter to me, Chick and I will do the rest. If I find I have need of assistance from headquarters, you will hear from me in a hurry."

It was four o'clock in the afternoon when the detective appeared for the second time that day at the foot of West One Hundred and Fifty-first Street, and now he appeared in the guise of a boatman, boat and all, and with a sporty-looking passenger seated in the stern.

The sporty passenger was Chick, while Nick looked like any other hanger-on along the shore of the river whose business it was to pick up quarters and halves and whole dollars honestly, if he could, but who meant to get them, anyway.

Patsy and Ten-Ichi had loafed along the shore in the vicinity of the yacht ever since the receipt of the inspector's letter, their business being to watch it unceasingly, and their report to Nick Carter, when he arrived for the second time on the scene, was that no person had left the yacht or gone aboard of it during the entire day.

Indeed, barely a sign of life had been seen aboard the craft, save that now and then one of the crew would appear, leaning over the rail and staring into the water.

With this understanding, and with the feeling that he now knew where his quarry was hiding, Nick rowed toward the *Howra* at a quarter past four o'clock.

His purpose was to examine her from the outside thoroughly, to speak her, if necessary, and to determine if it were feasible to attempt to board her sometime during the night.

It was only a short pull out to where she was lying, and, when they were within hailing distance, Nick rested on his oars and studied her carefully.

"She is certainly a beautiful craft, Chick," he said, in a low tone, so that his words could not by any possibility carry to the deck of the vessel.

"That she is," replied Chick. "She looks fast, too."

"I doubt if there is anything in the harbor that could catch her," was Nick's comment, half said to himself. "She is Watson design, I think. The *Howrah,* eh? That is a good name for her."

"What does the word mean, Nick?"

"A swift-running stream; something which nothing can catch or hold; and, strangely enough, the word also means vengeance; it depends upon how one accents it."

"It's a sort of a double ender, that name, eh?"

"Yes."

"What are you going to do now?"

"Row all the way around her, and examine her thoroughly. I may decide to speak her; I have not made up my mind about that yet."

He began rowing at once, and made the entire circuit without incident, and without once seeing a head appear above the bulwarks.

"One would suppose that the people aboard of her are all dead," was Chick's comment.

"Oh, they're alive, all right," replied Nick. "There can be no doubt of that. Doubtless, the rajah and Carruthers have got their heads together in another plot."

"What have they got left to plot about now?"

"Possibly the ruby; who knows?"

"The Orloff ruby?"

"Yes. You know, it is in the safe deposit vault at Orloff's, and we both know that the rajah would give his soul to obtain possession of it. Aside from its value, he has a superstitious belief in the stone. It would not surprise me a bit if those fellows made a determined effort to break into Orloff's to get it, too."

"They could hardly accomplish that, Nick."

"Who knows? All things are possible, and for cool effrontery and devilish daring, commend me to the master spirit aboard that craft—Maitland Carruthers."

"I say, Nick, did you notice the anchor chain, when we passed it?"

"Sure."

"They have got everything ready to slip their cable, if necessary, and put out to sea at a moment's notice."

"I know it; and that is the one thing I am afraid they will do. They have murdered Nadja, and they believe that her husband will be convicted of the crime, if he is ever caught, and so it is possible that they may sail at any moment. The fact that they have not done so already is the only thing to argue to the contrary, and there can be only one thing that is keeping them here."

"The ruby?"

"Yes."

"Ssss-hhh!"

They ceased talking, for at that moment a swarthy face appeared over the rail, and a pair of keen, black eyes regarded them curiously.

With a stroke of the oar, Nick turned the bow of his boat toward the yacht and pulled directly under the place where the head appeared.

"Hello, there!" he said, in longshore parlance. "That is a fine tub you have there, eh? Don't you think so, my man?"

Nick knew that the man would not understand him, and was, therefore, not surprised when he continued to look stolidly upon them, without attempting to reply, and without indication that he had so much as heard the words.

"Faith," said Nick, "you're a communicative cuss, aren't you? But I've traveled some in furrin' parts, and I'll try ye again. Maybe you'll know what this is. *Como esta usted?"*

The man aboard the yacht did not move a muscle or alter the expression of his face.

"Well, if you don't know Spanish, either, try this: *Como se va?"*

Still the man did not move.

"Sure, he don't know Dago, either," muttered Nick, as if to himself. Then, raising his voice, he tried again.

"*Comment vous portez vous, eh?* Sure, he's no frog eater, either. *Wie befienden sie sich? Ya giaowla ga-a?* That last is Chinese, you heathen; sure you ought to know that. On my word, what the divil is he?" he added, addressing Chick. And then: "Look here, my man, I've got wan more howdy-do up me sleeve, and, by my sowl, if ye don't answer that I'll go abiard the craft an' have a scrap with you as sure's me name is Finnegan! Now, listen, for I mane it!

"*Begannai-bur da-aowah,* eh?"

A gleam came into the eyes of the man who was leaning over the rail, and, without moving, he replied, in the same tongue—which was Hindustanee—that he was very well, indeed, thank you, and that he hoped the two men in the boat were the same.

Nick Carter laughed outright, for that was in keeping with the part he was playing.

"Faith, I got him that time!" he exclaimed to Chick, with apparent glee. "That was a good shot. Straight betune the eyes, and niver a drop of blood to tell of it. Now, listen, while I talk him deaf, dumb and blind in about a holy minute. Mebby ye don't know where I learned this lingo, Mr. Stevens, but I was shipwrecked once, and—but never mind; it's too long a story. Listen to me, now, will you?"

He turned again to the man on the deck, and began talking rapidly with him, in a patois of his own country, and the man listened, and replied, gravely enough. The substance of the conversation, being translated, was this:

"You have a beautiful craft there, my friend."

"Yes; and she is very swift."

"Like her name, eh? The *Howrah.*"

"Yes."

"Who owns her?"

"My master."

"And who is he?"

"The owner."

"Sure. I guessed that before you said it. What's his name?"

"I address him as 'your highness.'"

"Sure, he's a potentate—a nabob, eh? That's fine. I say, do you want to ship an extra hand? I'm for going to sea again, and I like the cut of your jib, my friend."

"We have a full crew, and we do not like foreigners."

"That's not polite—at least, it isn't to say so. Maybe——"

Nick paused in the remark he was about to make, for at that instant another face appeared beside the sailor's, and another voice demanded to know what all the talking was about.

The sailor answered him, after which he received an order, in a tone so low that Nick could not hear it, and then both men disappeared beyond the rail of the vessel.

But Nick Carter had seen all he wished to see, for the face that had appeared, for an instant only, was the face of Jaharazubar, rajah of Matarapur.

He did not wait for further conversation, for he knew that waiting would be useless; but he turned the prow of his boat toward shore and pulled swiftly away.

"Did you see him?" he asked of Chick, as soon as they were out of hearing from the yacht.

"Yes," replied Chick; "I saw him."

"It was the rajah."

"Sure."

"Well, lad, we've got our work cut out for us to-night."

"You mean to board the *Howrah* to-night?"

"You bet your life I do!"

"Don't you think that they will be more than ever on their guard, now that you have spoken them?"

"I don't care if they're a million times on their guard, I'm going aboard of the *Howrah* this very night, and you're going with me!" was the stern reply.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN ATTACK IN THE DARK.

"Suppose that the rajah should decide between now and night to up anchor and away—what will you do in that case?" asked Chick, when they were well ashore, and had seated themselves where both could keep an eye on the craft in the river.

"I'll telegraph to Quarantine to have her held up there," was the reply. "But the rajah will not do that. If I am any judge at all of the man, he's going to make a play for that ruby before he leaves this harbor, and I shouldn't wonder if he tried it on this very night."

The detective and Chick were soon joined by Ten-Ichi and Patsy, and the four seated themselves in one of the many pavilions along the shore and gave themselves up to the task of watching the *Howrah.*

It was almost dark before any sign of life was seen aboard her, however; and then a small boat was lowered from the davits on the port side, and a single man entered it and rowed directly toward the spot where Nick and his assistants were seated.

"Now, Ten-Ichi," said Nick, when the rower was almost at the wharf, "it is up to you. Go with that fellow, and keep him in sight until about half-past eleven, if he remains ashore as long as that. At midnight I want you to be here, no matter where he goes. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

Ten-Ichi glided away, and a few moments later Nick saw him in the wake of the individual of the small boat, ascending the One Hundred and Fifty-second Street hill.

"Now, lads," said Nick to Patsy and Chick, "keep your eyes peeled for developments. I should not at all wonder if others would leave the yacht before long."

He was not mistaken.

Not more than half an hour had passed when the launch to which the inspector had referred in his letter was lowered, and she glided away rapidly in the direction of the Battery, with three persons aboard; but the distance was so great, and it had become so dark, that it was impossible to determine who they were.

"There isn't a doubt in my mind that the rajah and Carruthers are both aboard that little craft," said Nick, musingly.

"Whither bound, do you suppose?" asked Chick .

"There is only one thing that could take them into the city to-night, and that is the Orloff ruby," replied the detective.

"Isn't it a little bit early for that?"

"It isn't too early to make their preparations. I shouldn't wonder if Ten-Ichi has the most exciting end of this affair, after all. I'm almost sorry that I ordered him to return here at midnight, no matter what happened."

After that there was a long time of weary waiting, with nothing doing at all.

Not another sign of life appeared aboard the yacht until after ten o'clock; but then still another boat left her side and was rowed toward the shore.

It was Nick Carter himself who left his seat this time.

"Remain here, lads," he said to his assistants, "and keep your eyes on the yacht. "Or, no; you remain here, Chick, and Patsy will come with me. Come along, kid."

Nick watched the course of the boat as it approached the shore, and managed to be standing with Patsy directly at the spot where the small boat touched the wharf when it landed.

He was surprised to discover that the boat contained six men, five of whom left it silently and without a word started away toward the city, while the sixth pushed off again and rowed back toward the yacht.

"Patsy," whispered the detective, "I will have to dispense with your presence, also. Go with those fellows, and stay with them. I fancy that they will bring you back here after a while. The tallest one is, evidently, the leader. Keep with him," and, as Patsy glided away through the darkness, Nick returned to his post beside Chick.

"At this rate," he said, as he seated himself, "I'll be left all alone to go aboard that craft when the time comes, although I hardly think that any more of her crew will come ashore."

"It is plain," said Chick, "that mischief of some sort is afoot."

"Sure thing; and, you may depend upon it, it is the ruby."

"How in the world do they expect to get at it, locked away as it is behind stone and steel walls?"

"You will have to ask somebody who is better posted than I am, Chick; but I have never heard of stone or of steel walls, either, which could not be blown to pieces, if sufficient explosive were employed."

"Great Scott! Such an explosion as that would shake the whole city, and wreck the building!"

"It certainly would."

"Do you really think they would dare attempt such a thing?"

"Yes, I really do, Chick; and, because I do think so, I am going to send you now straight to Inspector O'Brien, and I want you to keep after him till you find him. When you do find him, tell him of my suspicions. Say that I suggested that he place an extra guard in the vicinity of Orloff's at once, and keep them there all night."

"That will leave you here alone to board the yacht."

"No, it won't, for you will be back here before I shall care to go aboard. It is only half-past ten now. You ought to be back here inside of two hours, and I will wait that long."

Without another word, Chick hastened away, and thus Nick Carter was left alone to watch the yacht in the river.

He occupied himself in smoking and thinking, for the detective could always find congenial occupation by delving into his own brain for subjects of interest.

Eleven o'clock came; then twelve; then half-past twelve, and then one, and none of the assistants had returned.

"I'll wait half an hour longer," mused the detective, "and then, if none of them has shown up, I'll go it alone."

At half-past one he left the pavilion and went down to the boat he had used in the afternoon.

Even there he lingered for several moments, hoping that Chick or Patsy or Ten-Ichi would appear, but presently he gave up all hope of seeing any of them, and, with no little misgivings concerning them, he pushed off from the shore and rowed silently toward the mysterious *Howrah.*

The night, fortunately, was exeedingly dark. It was almost impossible to discern objects upon the water a hundred feet away, and the detective was not challenged as he rowed under the chains of the steamer and made fast with his painter.

Then he permitted his own boat to drift back against the side of the vessel, fending it with a huge wad of cotton waste which he had brought with him for the purpose, and thus preventing any noise to arise because of the chafing of the small boat against the larger.

He waited a long time to be assured that his approach had not been observed, and that no noise had disturbed the men on the vessel, and then he climbed slowly up over the high bow of the yacht into the forward chains, and so on down along the deck over the forepeak, under the bridge, and into the waist of the vessel.

If there was a watch on board, he did not discover him.

There seemed to be no sign of a human being anywhere, and the detective wondered vaguely if the rajah had deserted her.

But he dismissed the thought as soon as it came as utterly preposterous, for here was a vessel which, with her fittings, must have cost upward of a million dollars, at least; no man in his senses would desert such a craft as that, save under the most extreme circumstances, and Nick argued that the rajah could have no inkling that his own affairs had arrived at the point of extremity as yet.

He continued silently on his way aft, creeping on all fours and keeping under the denser shadow of the starboard rail, until he arrived at the companion way which led to the main cabin of the vessel.

Here he paused, to investigate more carefully before proceeding further, for there was a light burning in the cabin, and he argued that, in all probability, somebody was there with it.

He crept around, first on one side, and then on the other, peering in at the skylights whenever he had an opportunity to do so, but discovering nothing.

"This is queer business," he muttered. "I never knew of a vessel before which did not leave a watch on deck through the night, and I'll take my oath there is no watch here."

Nor was there.

Nowhere was there a sign of the presence of a human being.

"The whole thing looks like a plant," mused the detective. "Looks just as if they expected me, and had laid a trap to catch me. I think I'll wait a while before I make a move. Something may happen."

But nothing did happen.

He stretched out at full length upon the deck, with his body hugging the housing of the cabin, and for half an hour he did not move.

Nor did anyone else, as far as he was able to determine.

The entire vessel was as silent as a grave, and, save for the swish of the tide against the hull as it flowed outward toward the sea, and the whispering of the breeze from the northward as it glided past, no sound came to the expectant ear of the detective.

It was now after two o'clock, and Nick realized that, if he accomplished any part of his purpose in visiting the yacht, he must get to work at once, and so, with one more cautious look around him, he silently approached the companion way.

There was no impediment in his way.

The cabin door stood invitingly open, and he glided softly down the stairs.

The cabin in which he found himself was quite commodious, and was furnished luxuriously, being, evidently, the main salon of the vessel.

But he did not stop to take an inventory of the articles he saw; his interest just now was centered in two staterooms of the vessel—those occupied by Carruthers and the rajah.

The detective believed that, if he could have an opportunity to search through the effects of these men, he would be able to discover incontestable evidence of their guilt of the murder of Nadja, and it must be remembered that, although he was convinced that it was the rajah, or one of the followers of the rajah, who had murdered her, he had not the slightest proof of that theory.

After entering the cabin, he waited a moment, under cover of a shadow, and then, perceiving that he had aroused no one, he started forward again.

Further aft there was a narrow gangway which led to the stern of the vessel, and the detective had no doubt that he would find the staterooms he sought on either side of it.

Nor was he mistaken.

After a moment he pushed open a door which admitted him to a room which, at a glance, he knew was the one occupied by the rajah, and he entered, and closed the door behind him.

But he had his trouble for his pains, for, although he searched assiduously, he found nothing of value to take away with him.

"I'll try the cabin on the opposite side," he mused, and he turned back to the door and opened it.

Was it a shadow that he saw flitting away out of his sight as he stepped into the gangway?

He could not determine that; but he hesitated where he stood, remaining silent and motionless for a long time.

Then, as no sound or motion attracted him, he started forward again.

But he had not taken two steps before he heard a sudden noise behind him.

He wheeled in his tracks, but not quick enough.

A man from the darkness behind him leaped upon his back. Something like a cloak fell over the detective's head. He experienced a sense of suffocation, as if a thousand pairs of hands had seized him by the throat at once.

He struggled to overcome it. He made a mighty effort to use his great strength to free himself, and then he reeled and fell unconscious to the floor of the cabin.

CHAPTER IX.

STARING DEATH IN THE FACE.

When Nick Carter opened his eyes he was lying on his back on an improvised couch, which had been made by dragging a pair of the bulkhead cushions from their places and placing them on the floor of the cabin, side by side.

He noticed with surprise that he was not bound with ropes or cords, but that, nevertheless, he was as incapable of muscular effort as if he had been incased in a mold of plaster of Paris.

There was a pair of pillows under his head, which raised it sufficiently so that he could see objects in the cabin, and he at once observed the sinister face of the rajah peering down upon him, with snakelike eyes, which seemed to gloat over the treasure they had found in the capture of the detective.

He made another supreme effort to move then, but his legs and arms refused utterly to obey his will, and the rajah laughed aloud at his plight.

"You cannot move, Carter, so don't try it," he said, in perfect English, much to the astonishment of the detective. "The little drug I administered to you, just as you were returning to consciousness, has paralyzed every muscle in your body, save only your power of speech. But you can talk, if you wish to do so."

Nick did not reply, for at that instant Maitland Carruthers moved into his range of vision, and stood looking down upon him, with a cruel smile on his face.

"How do you like it, Carter?" he said, with an insolent sneer.

"Oh, I feel quite comfortable, if that is what you mean," replied the detective.

"You escaped me once, very nicely, Nick Carter," continued Carruthers, "but you won't be able to do it this time. I wonder how many lives you've got, anyhow?"

"More than you will be able to dispose of, Carruthers," was the calm reply.

"Do you think so, indeed? Really, you amaze me, Carter. That was a nice little trap that you walked into to-night, wasn't it?"

"It has that appearance—now. Be careful that you do not walk into one that has been set for you."

"Oh, I'm on my guard—always on my guard, as you have, no doubt, discovered. Carter, would you like me to give you your life and liberty?"

"Well, I'm not tired of life just yet."

"I'm not joking. I mean it."

"You will have to prove it by setting me at liberty, then, for the only condition upon which I could be brought to believe anything you say would be a practical demonstration."

"If you will agree to a proposal I have to make, you will be liberated; and, if you will not agree to it, half a dozen twenty-pound shot will be tied to your feet, and you will be thrown overboard in just about thirty minutes from now."

"You might as well do the heaving at once, for I don't believe that I can agree to any proposal you would make."

"I am not so sure of that. A man will sometimes do a great deal to save his life."

"Yes? Possibly."

"You haven't heard the proposal yet."

"No; that is true, I haven't."

"The rajah and I want the Orloff ruby."

"Oh, do you? You surprise me. You do, indeed."

"This is no time for joking, Carter."

"Then don't joke."

"I'm not joking; I'm in dead earnest."

"About the ruby?"

"Yes."

"Then, if you want it, why don't you go and get it? Emerson tells us to take out of life whatsoever we desire."

"I did try to get it to-night, but you had forethought enough to spoil our plans—or, at least, somebody did so."

"How was that?"

"We were going to blow up the whole establishment of Orloff & Co., but we found the place guarded by about a regiment of cops."

"So you backed out, eh?"

"Yes. We backed out, thanks to you."

"Pray don't mention it."

"Now for that proposal."

"Yes."

"We want that ruby. We want you to get it for us. We don't care how you get it, but we want you to do the act. You can do it, and you know you can. You have the confidence of the people at Orloff's. You can do what we find it impossible to do. If you will do that, we will set you free. If you will give me your promise to deliver the ruby into my hands at any time within a month, you shall go free now."

"Didn't I understand you to say that this was no time for joking?" asked Nick, with a smile on his face.

"I am not joking. I am in deadly earnest."

"Well, drop it, then."

"Do you mean that you will not agree to my proposition?"

"I could not if I would, and I would not if I could. That is the only answer I can give you."

"Do you know what that answer means to you?"

"I know what you have said it would mean."

Carruthers took out his watch.

"You shall have thirty minutes to think it over," he said.

"That is unnecessary, for I shall not change my mind."

"You might. If you do not, into the river you go in just thirty minutes from now, with a hundred and twenty pounds of iron tied to your heels."

The detective shrugged his shoulders, and made no reply. Presently, however, he remarked, as if it were the most indifferent subject in the world:

"Before you give me that bath you are talking about, I would like you to tell me who it was who murdered Nadja Montague, if you have no objections."

The features of Maitland Carruthers clouded into an ominous scowl, and he cast one threatening glance toward the rajah, who had remained silent during this conversation; and it was a look which boded ill for the Indian, if he should ever fall into the power of his tool. Nick saw it, and understood it, and wondered at it, for he read murder in that one look, if ever he had seen it depicted in human eyes.

It was the rajah himself who replied to the question, and he laughed aloud as he did so.

"Since you will so soon be food for the fishes," he said, "it can do no harm to enlighten you. It was I, as you American dogs say, and I did it with my little dagger—or, to be more exact, with Nadja's little dagger."

"You despicable scoundrel!" said Nick, and he struggled again to free himself from the bondage in which the drug held his limbs.

Again the rajah laughed aloud.

"It was clever, wasn't it?" he asked, with a grin on his swarthy face. "And already the whole police force is out looking for the man they think is guilty—the husband, eh? An English dog, whom they will electrocute for the murder of his wife when they catch him. It was really a clever plot, and I am quite proud of it."

"Shall I tell you how you did it?" said Nick, for he could not resist the desire to deprive this human monster of some of the satisfaction he felt over the deed.

"By all means, if you happen to know."

"You bribed the servants to leave the house where Nadja lived. You watched outside the house the following morning, believing that Mrs. Sylvester would go out in search of other servants, and thus leave Nadja alone and unprotected; and, while you watched, you saw the husband enter there.

"Then you waited, for it worked well with your plans, and you knew Nadja well enough to know that she would not permit the man to remain long in her presence.

"From where you watched, you could see that Mrs. Sylvester had gone to her room, and you argued that she could not hear you when you entered, and, when Montague came out, you crossed the street, and with a cleverly bent wire you opened the door and entered the house.

"Ah, I surprise you, do I not, with my knowledge of the affair? Very well; let me tell you what you did after that.

"You closed the door silently behind you. You crept through the hall to the door of the conservatory, for Carruthers had already been at the house on another day, and you knew the room which Nadja delighted to frequent.

"You crept through the hall like the snake you are, you opened the door into the conservatory without a sound; you passed inside.

"Nadja was on the couch, reading a book, and you stole forward like a ghost until you were within reach of her; and then you pressed a handkerchief, saturated with some drug I do not know, over her face.

"Whatever that drug was, it acted quickly, for she became instantly unconscious, and then you moved around deftly to one side, and like a coward—like anything too despicable to mention—you stabbed her through the heart as she lay there unconscious before you.

"After that you found a letter she had written. It was lying on the desk, sealed, and you opened it and read it. There was a handkerchief there, which Paul Montague had dropped, and you placed the handkerchief over the letter.

"Then, Jaharazubar, rajah of Matarapur, you stole away out of the house again, leaving, as you thought, no trace behind you."

During this recital by the detective the rajah's face had changed from derision to astonishment, and then to utter amazement, and, at the conclusion, he said:

"You are a wizard, Nick Carter!"

"You will find that I am wizard enough to down you, for, even if you do tie a hundred and twenty pounds of iron to my heels and throw me into the river, it will not save you from the chair up at Sing Sing, don't forget that!"

"Enough of this!" exclaimed Carruthers. "You know altogether too much, Carter."

"I know a great deal more than I have told you—yet."

"What more?"

"Find out—if you can, you thief!"

"And how about that proposition of mine?"

"You have had your answer already."

"Then we need wait no longer."

Carruthers rose, and slapped his hands together, and immediately five men of the crew appeared from the deck, each with an iron shot, to which a rope had been attached, in his hands.

While two of them busied themselves in fastening these shot securely to the detective's legs, two more tied his hands together behind his back, and, when he was thoroughly trussed, they glanced inquiringly at their superior officers.

"You have one more chance now, Carter, and this is the last call for breakfast," said Carruthers, with a grin. "Say the word, and off comes the ropes; refuse to say it, and into the river you go, as quick as we can carry you to the side of the vessel!"

Nick remained silent. He made no reply at all.

"You wouldn't steal, even to save your life, eh?" said Carruthers, jeeringly.

Still Nick made no reply.

"Up with him, men!" ordered Carruthers, in Hindustanee.

The men gathered around the detective and lifted him from the deck.

Then, at a sign from their master, they started with their burden toward the companion way, and so out upon the deck.

Not another word was spoken.

And then the men lifted the detective over the rail and dropped him into the black waters of the river.

CHAPTER X.

NICK CARTER'S BOLD ATTACK.

It is not known whether the rajah and Carruthers remained at the side of the vessel long enough to see that their victim did not rise to the surface again or not; the probability is that they did not, and it would not have availed them had they done so, for the darkness of the night was so intense that they could have seen nothing.

There was, however, another person present, who, if he did not see things as plainly as he might have done in daylight, acted with no less expedition, for all that.

That person was Chick.

In following out the directions given him by his chief, and after delivering the message to the inspector, he was returning to the place of appointment to meet Nick, when he came unexpectedly upon the rajah and Carruthers.

He took their trail and followed them, finally leaving them at the Battery, where they embarked in the launch that had taken them there.

Once, and only once, while riding downtown in an elevated train, he sat close enough to them to overhear their conversation, and, as they spoke in Hindustanee, they were not as guarded in their speech as they might otherwise have been.

What he overheard repaid him for all the effort he had put forth in following them, for from their talk he learned that they suspected that the two men who had talked

with one of their sailors from a boat that afternoon were Nick Carter and one of his assistants, and that they fully expected that the detective would attempt to board the *Howrah* that very night.

Having been foiled in their intention of blowing up the store of Orloff & Co., they were now on their way back to the yacht, where they confidently expected to find Nick Carter, and possibly one or more of his assistants, prisoners, since before leaving the vessel they had prepared for his coming, and had laid a trap so well that they had no doubt he would walk into it, as we now know that he did.

The information was enough for Chick.

He lost no time in getting back to the vicinity of the yacht, where he found Patsy and Ten-Ichi waiting, not knowing what to do in the absence of both Nick and Chick.

The two lads explained their delay in returning merely on the ground that they also had fallen in with the rajah and Carruthers, and had followed them until they lost them, which must have been just prior to the time when Chick picked them up so fortunately.

And the entire incident was fortunate, for, had the four of them gone aboard the yacht together, all would have been taken prisoners, and all would have perished; nothing could have saved them from the vengeance of the rajah in that case.

As it was, conditions looked dark enough.

Chick gave his orders rapidly.

"You will row with me out to a spot that is close to the *Howrah*," he said, "and then I will slip quietly overboard. You are to remain where I leave you, without moving, until you hear from me. I will board the yacht, and find out what is doing. After that we will act together."

It so happened that at the very moment when Chick climbed upon the deck of the yacht Nick opened his eyes to consciousness, and Chick, who had crept silently aft, successfully passing the two men on the deck who were now acting as the watch, succeeded in stationing himself close to an open window of the cabin, from which position he heard every word of the conversation that has just been recorded.

There is no use, therefore, of going into that again.

Chick waited where he was until the moment arrived when he knew that they were about ready to cast Nick into the water, and then he slipped overboard again and swam hastily to the boat in which he had left his two companions.

"Quick!" he said. "There is no time to lose. They are about to throw Nick overboard, weights tied to his feet. I don't know which side. You two take the starboard. I will take the port side, alone. Make the painter fast to the anchor chain, and get into the water. Quick! There is no time to lose!"

That was all that was said, but it was enough.

Each one understood what his duty was, and each was prepared to perform it.

And, as it happened, Chick had selected the side from which Nick Carter, with the shot tied to his feet, was cast into the water.

When they dropped him, Chick dived into the depths.

He was a master swimmer, and he had an open knife in his teeth, ready for instant use.

He was directly under the detective when they dropped him into the river, and it is a wonder, almost, that one of the shot did not strike the daring swimmer on the head.

And now we will return to Nick himself.

He believed that at last his time had come.

He knew that it was utterly impossible that he could free himself, for the effects of the drug were still upon him—although it left him like magic the instant he touched the water—to say nothing of the bonds which held his arms and legs.

Down, down he went, rapidly, and he had almost touched the bottom, when he felt that somebody or something had seized him.

He felt a pair of hands glide swiftly along his arms; then there was a sharp tug at the ropes, and his hands and arms were free.

The hands glided still further, feeling their way, and again there were pulls and twists and tugs upon the ropes that held his legs.

Then, suddenly, he knew that they were rising to the surface, and he realized that in some way he had been freed—that he had been snatched back from the very jaws of death; and more, the effects of the drug had entirely disappeared, and his strength had returned as sound as ever.

What a delicious draught of air that was that he took into his lungs when the surface of the river was reached—air which he had expected never to breathe again!

And then, close to his ear, he heard a whispered word from Chick.

"It is I—Chick," he said. "Are you able to follow me?"

"Yes; I am as fit as ever I was."

"Come, then."

Through the black waters they glided until the boat was reached, and there they found that Ten-Ichi and Patsy had just climbed into it, having returned to the boat when they discovered that the glory of saving their chief had fallen to Chick.

Without a word being spoken, they rowed silently away through the darkness until they were well out of hearing from the vessel, and then they rested on their oars, and exchanged congratulations.

"That was a narrow squeeze, Chick!" said the detective, grasping the hand of his chief assistant. "It was about as close a call as I ever had."

"Thank God I was there in time!" murmured Chick, almost speechless with emotion.

"It all goes to show," mused the detective, aloud, "that there are times when it is best that orders should not be carried out too literally. If you had all been able to do exactly as I directed, not only I, but all of us, might have been food for fishes by this time."

They were all silent for a moment, and then Nick spoke again.

"Do you realize what we have got to do now?" he asked of them.

"No," replied Chick. "What is it?"

"We must capture those two men before daylight, or we will lose them forever."

"How so?"

"I said enough to them to frighten them thoroughly. Unless I am greatly mistaken, they will up anchor and away for India with the first gleam of daylight."

"And they must not escape."

"Escape! I would not let that Indian hyena get away for all the wealth that is stored in the vaults of the city of New York! Escape? Not much!"

"It is rather a large proposition for four of us to tackle, isn't it?" asked Chick. "Not that I hesitate to undertake it, Nick. I was only thinking of the chances of success."

"I understood you, Chick. But, whatever those chances may be, for or against us, they must be taken. Carruthers and the rajah of Matarapur must be in a prison cell before daylight, or they never will be. That is the proposition."

"How are you going to do it?"

"We are going back there as soon as we are rested, and those two villains have had time to go to bed. It is a safe proposition that they will turn in for a little rest before very long. What is the condition of your weapons, lads?"

"Mine are all right," replied Chick.

"And mine, also," said Ten-Ichi.

"And mine," remarked Patsy.

"And mine are always in condition, in water or out of it," said Nick. "We will probablly have to use them, and, if we do, you need not hesitate about shooting pretty straight. An Indian or two, more or less, won't make any difference to the wagging of the world."

"Right you are!" said Chick, with a grin, which, however, could not be seen through the darkness.

They held the boat where it was for half an hour, and then Nick gave the word, and they pulled silently toward the hull of the yacht.

As had been done twice before that night, they tied the painter to the anchor chain, and then, one by one, with Nick Carter in the lead, they climbed aboard.

They had no sooner gained the deck than it at once became evident that none of the people on board the yacht had any thought that they would be disturbed again that night.

The watch in the forward chains was asleep at his post, and he did not waken till late the following day—and then it was in a hospital, with a broken head, for when Nick tapped him with the butt of his revolver he did not do it any too gently.

After that they crept aft slowly.

There was another watch amidships, and he received the same attention that had been devoted to his companion forward. He also succumbed, and subsequently he awakened in the cot that adjoined his mate's.

"There should be another one aft, near the taffrail," whispered the detective. "Wait here, all of you. I will attend to him."

He did, and a third cot at St. Luke's was supplied on the following morning.

"Now for the forward hatch," said Nick, when he rejoined his companions. "Come with me, Chick. Ten-Ichi, you and Patsy will wait here."

The two detectives made their way silently to the forecastle hatch then.

To fix it in place, to put down the iron clamp which was used to batten it in case of a storm, and to make it securely fast there, was the work of only a moment; and then, with a light laugh, which, however, could not have been heard ten feet away, the detective rose to his feet.

"We are masters of the situation now, Chick," he said.

"Yes; but there are still the officers."

"There are only two of them, I think. I believe that two officers, the rajah and Carruthers are all that we have to contend with now. But we will soon find out."

They tiptoed to the waist of the vessel, where they had left Ten-Ichi and Patsy, and, having given them their instructions, Nick led the way toward the cabin.

"I did not think to return here so soon, and in just this manner," he thought to himself, as he reached the companion way and turned to see that his assistants were close behind him, prepared for the work that was before them. "I was nearer the truth than I realized when I told Carruthers that I had more lives than he could dispose of. I reckon he will think so, too, when he sees me now. He thinks that I am at the bottom of the river, and that crabs and little fishes are already nibbling at my nose."

Then he entered the cabin.

There was a dim light burning exactly where it had been when he was there before, and beyond it he could hear the resonant sound of a snore, as it proceeded from one of the staterooms.

He listened a moment, and then he heard the whir of the dynamo in the hold.

"The switch is over on the port side, Chick," he said. "Find it, and turn on the lights. We may as well see what we are about."

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIGHT IN THE CABIN OF THE YACHT.

The sudden glare of the electric light, illuminating the cabin of the yacht as if for a function or an occasion of festivity, awakened the occupants of the staterooms at one and the same instant, as Nick had hoped it would do, for he had reckoned upon the confusion which would be the result of it, and also that the surprise and astonishment at the event would bring every person there from their cabins, and thus apprise the detectives of their number.

It was something to know at the outset just how many people there were to fight, and the advantage would be on the side of the intruders, since they were prepared for it.

The plan worked just about as the detective had hoped it would.

With the sudden glare of light, there were exclamations of surprise and alarm from the rooms, and four men came leaping out into the larger cabin almost simultaneously.

Carruthers was in advance of all the others, and, when his eyes fell upon Nick Carter, who was directly in front of him, he uttered an exclamation of mingled fright and rage, and then, without a thought of the danger he incurred, he hurled himself full at the detective's throat, affording Nick no opportunity to make use of his weapons.

It fell to Chick to grapple with the rajah, and to Patsy and Ten-Ichi to attend to the two who remained.

It was rather a remarkable circumstance that each pair were very evenly matched.

Nick afterward confessed that he was never so surprised in his life as when the arms of Maitland Carruthers closed around him, and he felt that in that steel-like grip there reposed a degree of strength as great, or at least almost as great, as his own.

And the rajah was a giant in strength, also, if not in stature.

Chick, who, as the reader knows, was, and is, almost as powerful as Nick Carter himself, found that he had all he could attend to in the East Indian nabob, who smiled as he fought, and who seemed to be delighted because he had the opportunity.

With Patsy and Ten-Ichi it was the same.

The captain of the vessel fell to Ten-Ichi, and he was as lithe and slippery as a snake; but it is doubtful if he had ever had to do with a Jap before that time; it is certain that he knew nothing about the tricks of jiu jitsu.

Contending against Patsy was the first officer of the yacht, or the man who acted in that capacity.

Strangely enough, he was quite a young man—about Patsy's own age—and he fought very much as Irishmen fight—that is, after Patsy's own style, which infinitely pleased the lad, for Patsy loved a scrap as well as any of his countrymen.

After that one exclamation from the lips of Carruthers, they fought in silence, with no sound save that made by their struggles as they heaved from side to side in the cabin.

The scene resolved itself into a quadruple wrestling match, with the odds about even, for the men who had been so suddenly aroused from their slumbers had retired without removing their outer clothing, and were, therefore, as well prepared for the *mêlée* as were the detectives themselves.

For a period of fully five minutes—and that is a very long interval under such circumstances—the struggles went on without material advantage to either side, and

then Patsy threw his man to the floor of the cabin, falling on top of him and pinning him down.

But the arms which held Patsy clinched him all the tighter, and, try as he might, he could not free one of them in order to strike a telling blow.

At least, he could not do so at once; but presently, just as Ten-Ichi downed the captain in the same manner, he succeeded in doing so.

And it was not one blow, but twenty, that Patsy rained on his head and face, until his opponent's features were beaten to a pulp, and blood flowed like water from his nose and lips.

Ten-Ichi, at the right moment, had gotten the captain where he could work the jiu jitsu on him, and that officer suddenly felt himself lifted from the floor and hurled backward over the Jap's head like a shot out of a gun.

He did not stop, either, until he came in contact with the bulkhead, and then he fell to the floor of the cabin, as limp as any rag and utterly senseless.

Ten-Ichi and Patsy turned at the same instant to go to the assistance of the others, but even as they did so the fight was concluded.

This is what they saw as they turned:

Chick dropped suddenly to his knees. He seized the rajah around the legs near his ankles, and, with a sudden jerk, pulled him from his feet.

Then Chick straightened up again, and, with his mighty strength exerted to the utmost, he literally used the rajah as he might have done with a whip lash, for he whirled him around, holding him by the ankles, and then sent him spinning across the cabin, where he, also, came up against the bulkhead, head first, and with a force which crashed through the panel of the joinery work.

And at the very same instant the struggle between Nick and Carruthers came to an end.

It has already been said that they were about evenly matched, and until that moment there had been no advantage on either side.

But now Nick nerved himself for an extra effort.

He resorted to a trick much the same as that employed by Chick against the rajah—that is, he also dropped to his knees and attempted to seize Carruthers around the legs.

But Carruthers knew the trick, and, when the detective dropped down to seize him, he also dropped, so they presented the strange spectacle of fighting and wrestling on their knees.

That was, however, only for an instant.

Both men struggled to their feet again, and at the same instant.

This time, however, Nick had a trifle the advantage, and, besides, he had more endurance than his opponent.

As they rose and faced each other this last time, Nick's arms shot out and encircled the neck of his adversary. Then he pulled Carruthers toward him, and he shut down upon that neck with all the terrible strength he had left, and it was mighty.

Carruthers gasped. Then he grew limp. Then he staggered, and then, like the one-hoss shay, he gave out all at once.

There was nothing left for him to fight with, but Nick Carter did not realize that, and he lifted the man from his feet. Then he pushed him a little away from him, and then he struck him full in the face with his right hand while he held him at arm's length with the left one.

And just as he would have released him, and so have permitted him to sink to the floor in an unconscious heap, there came a cry from the direction of the door.

In a flash, Nick Carter turned, still holding the now unconscious Carruthers in his iron grasp.

A man stood there, dazed and frightened.

In that one glance Nick knew it was the engineer, whom he had forgotten to take into account when they came aboard.

With lightning-like quickness, Nick raised Carruthers from the floor bodily, and then, as the engineer rushed forward to take a hand in the fight—and a long and deadly knife gleamed in his grasp—the detective hurled the body of his now senseless opponent full into his face, so that both rolled to the floor together.

And that ended the fight.

It also ends the story, reader.

Is it necessary to say that Nick Carter kept his word, and that the rajah and Carruthers each occupied a cell before the dawn of another day?

They did; and the police of New York libeled the vessel and took possession of her, pending other disposition of her.

Just one word about Paul Montague.

He recovered from his attack of brain fever, and ultimately returned to his home in England, a sadder, a wiser, but also a broken, man.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 458, will contain "A Tragedy of the Sea; or, Nick Carter's Desperate Fight."

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